THE ATTITUDES TOWARD SLUM LIFE IN THE AMERICAN POPULAR NOVEL, 1890-1910

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ABSTRACT

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By

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By the turn of the century the slum was a well established fact of American life. It had developed into a major concern of investigative, governmental committees as well as legions of settlement-house workers. At the same time, some authors of popular fiction, magazine writers, and journalists were attempting to incorporate the slum into their fiction. This study examines these authors' novels of slum life to ascertain what attitudes they reflect toward this phenomenon. Since they either sold well or aimed for high sales, these portrayals can be relied upon to give representative popular conceptions of the poor and their living conditions.

Chapter One outlines slum conditions between 1890 and 1910, a period rich in investigations and commission reports on the slum. Contemporary accounts and modern historical studies are cited to substantiate the slum reality. Next, relevant non-fiction of late nineteenth-century writers like Jacob Riis and Hutchins Hapgood is examined for its rendition of these facts. While historical and investigative accounts, as well as photographs of the day, reveal crowded, unsanitary tenements, these non-fiction studies focus on the colorful appearance of exotic slum residents, much as does the majority

of fiction to be treated here. This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of American fiction during these years. Most major authors either ignored the slum, or, like Stephen Crane, Jack London, and David G. Phillips, appropriated the facts of slum life and transformed them into abstractions in a serious literature of ideas. Most minor authors working in the vein of romances and escapist fiction also avoided portraying slum life and concentrated on historical or religious novels, society love stories, or fiction with rural settings.

Chapter Two treats twenty-nine novels that use slum life as the basis for their stories. Twenty-two of these are sentimental versions of slum material that range from humorous novels by George Ade and exposé-like fiction by Alfred Lewis, to stories of love and success in the slum by authors like I. K. Friedman, Ernest Poole, and Edward Townsend. Seven works, however, including Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and Abraham Cahan's *Yekl*, create credible pictures of slum life that seem authentic reflections of the actual conditions noted in Chapter One.

The third chapter focuses on twenty-six novels that go beyond simply depicting conditions and begin to offer various solutions to tenement life problems like poverty and disease. Eighteen of these works show ministers and charity workers founding settlement houses or trying to encourage apathetic, middle-class characters to sympathize with slum dwellers. Eight other novels depict labor leaders striving to improve the lot of workingmen in the slums. These range from the portrayal of anarchist violence in Frank Harris' *The Bomb*, to a milder picture of labor protest in Edward King's *Joseph Zalmonah*. Despite their over-reliance on the same romantic elements seen in the novels included in Chapter Two, these works, nevertheless, do present possible remedies for actual slum ills.

The attitude in the most convincing novels of slum life is one of serious concern for those who must endure the hardships of tenement life. But the number of such forceful works is small. The majority of these novels use the slum as a background for routine stories of love and adventure. Thus, they consider the slum a fascinating, colorful new facet of the American culture: it is a curiosity rather than an increasingly characteristic aspect of American urban life. Perhaps the best that can be said for this fiction's confrontation with the slum is that its idealizations may have allowed readers to see this disturbing development in a pleasing and agreeable light. For had they relied solely on slum committee reports or personal encounters with the slum, the chaos it represented would have been considerably more threatening.

THE ATTITUDES TOWARD SLUM LIFE IN THE AMERICAN POPULAR NOVEL, 1890-1910

By

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In the mid 1960's *The Secular City*, by theologian Harvey Cox, achieved a mild popularity and thus called attention to a continuing issue in American life. Cox celebrates twentieth century urbanization as a process modern man should welcome and utilize to his advantage. Many of his contemporaries, however, were so disenchanted, even felt threatened by this phenomenon, that they were deserting urban centers in virtual stampedes.[1] This popular disillusionment, on one hand, and *The Secular City*'s optimism that urban anonymity and mobility can humanize rather than brutalize, on the other, are both part of the centuries long debate over the nature of cities and their effect on man. From the time men began to gather in urban centers until the present, cities have been characterized simultaneously as dangerous, ugly blots on an otherwise serene landscape, and as havens of opportunity where man can best fulfill his human potential.

The desirability of urbanization was a matter for debate even in largely rural, early America. Proponents of the advantages of city life, such as William Penn and Pierre L'Enfant, took it for granted that America was to be an orderly, urban civilization. But others,

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[1] "Report of the Committee for Economic Development," *The American City*, ed. Charles N. Glaab, (Homewood, Illinois, 1963), p. 465. This corporation sponsored study indicated in 1960 that building and retail trade were both in decline in central cities while increasing in suburban areas. Further, between 1947 and 1954 American cities registered drops of from three to eight percent in the number of employees in manufacturing.

most notably Thomas Jefferson, were convinced the country would best prosper as an agrarian commonwealth, and that large metropolitan centers represented all that was pernicious and unhealthy in the old-world society of Europe. By the late nineteenth century the question of the importance of the city in our life was determined, even though considerable argument persisted concerning the actual value of cities to our culture. The industrial revolution, imported from England at mid-century, made the intensity of the issue urgent for the first time in American history. With the emergence of factories, a large working class, and rapidly developed, poorly planned urban living areas, life became a fast-paced struggle for existence for millions of Americans. The most obvious outward sign of this turmoil was the city slum, a flagrant, unhappy result of this sudden change in our way of life.

That the slum was an established phenomenon of American city life by 1890 is attested to by the novels to be examined in this study. All these works acknowledge the existence of the slum, and display a variety of reactions to it. Although most are forgotten today, they sold reasonably well in their own time, or were published by major houses that hoped for them to sell well across the country. They are invariably passed over in literary histories, for the obvious reason that most are inconsequential artistic expressions. Even though these novels may be dismissed on literary grounds, however, they remain significant in providing a gauge of the real American attitude toward the city slum during these years. The ways aspiring popular novelists wrote about the slum, the characters and events they chose to depict, and the solutions they offered to the slum dilemma all combine to reveal the popular American reactions to this product of the industrial age.

A Review of Research

For the reason noted, few of the novelists to be discussed here are given much attention in standard American literary histories. When discussing the urban fiction of these years, critics tend to focus on two Chicago authors, Henry B. Fuller and Robert Herrick, neither of whom was particularly interested in the slum as fictional subject matter. Their carefully detailed pictures of Chicago business and society life are often considered realistic works influenced by Howells' treatment of the commonplace. Some of the major literary surveys that look at these authors as Howellsian chroniclers of their own expansive city are Walter C. Bronson's *A Short History of American Literature* (1919), Carl Van Doren's *Contemporary American Novelists* (1922), Grant C. Knight's *American Literature and Culture* (1932), and Arthur Hobson Quinn's *American Fiction* (1936).

Other similar histories and critical studies call these same authors naturalists more closely related to Dreiser and Norris than to Howells. The basis for this classification seems largely to be a quotation by Dreiser, mentioned in Lars Åhnebrink's *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction* (1961), to the effect that he regarded Fuller as the first American naturalist. Earlier histories also class Fuller and Herrick with the naturalists: *The Cambridge History of American Literature* (1921), Russel Blankenship's *American Literature* (1931), and Alexander Cowie's *The Rise of the American Novel* (1948) all consider the novels of Fuller and Herrick early examples of the kind of naturalistic investigations undertaken by Dreiser a few years later.

Most important for the study at hand is that these general literary histories almost always deal only with Fuller and Herrick as the minor city novelists of this period. But other more specialized studies go

further than the standard, general histories in recognizing the work of other minor novelists writing specifically about slum life. In *Economic Criticism in American Fiction, 1792-1900* (1937), Claude R. Flory discusses a number of less well remembered writers under categories such as "General Economic Injustice and Unhappiness as Treated in the Novel." Similarly, Walter F. Taylor in *The Economic Novel in America* (1942) devotes over fifty pages to "The Lesser Novelists," and four pages specifically to the literature of the slums around 1900. He mentions such interesting novelists of the slums as H. H. Boyesen, Isaac K. Friedman, Roy L. McCardell, and Lillian W. Betts--all of whom wrote atmospheric novels of slum life but are never included in discussions of realism, naturalism, or even "city fiction" in the main literary histories. Like the present investigation, these economic studies approach slum novels from the point of view of content and what the novels *do*, rather than from the literary standpoint of style and how they relate to successful realistic works. Such considerations also enable some cultural or historical works to discuss various minor writers who do not fit readily into the mainstream of fiction. Henry Steele Commager's *The American Mind* (1950), and Van Wyck Brooks's *The Confident Years* (1952), among many others, offer valuable insights into the work of Hutchins Hapgood, Abraham Cahan, and Ernest Poole, writers who displayed distinct attitudes toward the slum, but whose artistic skills do not gain them much recognition from historians of literature.

A few substantial, specialized studies of city fiction offer a wide range of approaches to a large variety of novels and stories dealing with city life. Arthur B. Maurice in *New York in Fiction* (1901) and *The New York of the Novelists* (1917) is one of the first critics to examine fiction on city life: although not rigorously academic, he

thoroughly appreciates the city as a legitimate topic for both those who write fiction and those who criticize it. Both books survey New York City in fiction, with special attention to tracking down the originals of fictional people and places. More recent work on New York fiction has been done by Eugene Arden in "The New York Novel: A Study in Urban Fiction," (an unpublished doctoral dissertation written in 1953), "The Evil City in American Fiction," and "The Early Harlem Novel."[1] These works contain excellent discussions of New York as a powerful fictional subject. Novelists dealing with the city, Arden notes in his dissertation,

> have designated New York as a place-name symbol for new opportunity, wealth, and power; yet at the same time other novelists have pictured New York as a gathering place for all the depraved and frustrating influences in American life.[2]

He goes on to look at nineteenth century depictions of both New York's less pleasant side and its gay society life. Arden devotes especially thoughtful discussions to "island communities" (Greenwich Village, Harlem, and the immigrant ghettos) and writers who show the problems newcomers to these neighborhoods have. In short, this work is valuable for its serious handling of New York fiction, from the days of Dutch rule until the present. Arden goes considerably further than Maurice in investigating lesser known New York fiction that is

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[1]Eugene Arden, "The Evil City in American Fiction," *New York History*, XXXV (July, 1954), 259-79; "The Early Harlem Novel," *Phylon*, XX (Spring, 1959), 25-31.

[2]Eugene Arden, "The New York Novel," Diss. Ohio State 1953, p. 4. Page numbers of subsequent references to this work are cited parenthetically in the text. I will follow such a practice throughout this study for consecutive quotations from the same source.

> not so much concerned with man's struggle against man, or against himself, but against an environment which is less a "setting" in the conventional sense than a leading character. (p. 158)

A special theme in city fiction is presented in Elwood Lawrence's "The Immigrant in American Fiction, 1890-1920," an unpublished 1943 doctoral dissertation that mentions numerous novels to be included in the present study. Looking at various treatments of the immigrant in popular fiction in Chapter IV (humorous, sentimental, local color), Lawrence notes such minor figures as James Sullivan, Alvan Sanborn, and Myra Kelly, all of whom wrote extremely popular magazine fiction accounts of life in city ghettos around 1900. Further, 220 pages of this work are devoted to autobiographies of immigrant authors like Jacob Riis and Hutchins Hapgood.

Two general books on city fiction are valuable for different reasons. The first, *The City in the American Novel, 1789-1900* (1934) by George A. Dunlap, is a compendium on "contemporary conditions" in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. Dunlap presents a dazzling panorama of close to fifty novelists, major and minor, who deal with the city in one way or another in these years. This work is a lengthy, annotated bibliography of lesser known city novels, from Bayard Taylor's *John Godfrey's Fortunes* (1805) to Robert Grant's *Unleavened Bread* (1900). A wide variety of peculiarly urban themes is covered, from intemperance to plagues; but Dunlap attempts little analysis of the novels, so that the book ends up as purely a survey of fiction with an urban setting, rather than an interpretation of the forces of city life as they appear in the American novel.

The American City Novel (1954) by Blanche H. Gelfant concentrates on major authors such as Dreiser, Dos Passos, and Farrell, with useful

discussion of the city novel as a genre. According to Gelfant, a legitimate city novel is one in which the urban setting plays a decisive role in the story's action and meaning. Such a distinction is important in works like those of William Sidney Porter or George Ade which are set in the city, but never really convince the reader they are presenting an environment that seriously determines the quality of their characters' lives. Further useful interpretations of a general sort are found in Chapter Two, "The Sociology of City Life," which presents Gelfant's assertion that the primary theme in all city novels is the phenomena of "personal disassociation" and alienation that accompany modern urban life, conditions that will be seen in the more skillful novels in this study.

The single previous work that concentrates extensively on slum novels is an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Vahe R. Gulbenkian entitled "The Slum Movement in English and American Fiction, 1880-1900, A Chapter in the History of the Modern Novel" (1951). Concentrating on British slum novels and stories, Gulbenkian discusses this type of fiction as an outgrowth of nineteenth-century labor movements, and literarily as a part of naturalism's revolt against Victorian restraint. Especially valuable are discussions of the English trend of realistic slum fiction following the publication of Arthur Morrison's *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894) and the more idealized treatments that take their cue from Walter Besant's *All Sorts of Conditions of Men* (1882). Gulbenkian's isolation of these two divergent trends is important, for the same contrasting points of view will be found in American popular slum novels from 1890 to 1910. In two chapters of about twenty-five pages each, "Realistic Fiction of Ghetto Life," and "The Popular Novel of Slum Life," Gulbenkian mentions over twenty authors of American slum

life fiction. Hervey White, C. Emma Cheney, and Agnes Machar, for example, are seldom acknowledged by other critics of literature or history. The analysis of these novels is usually brief, ranging from three pages on an important work like Abraham Cahan's *Yekl* to only a few lines on most of the others. But in citing these writers and noting others in his bibliography, Gulbenkian provides the best existing compilation of the slum fiction of these years.

Finally, two works of a different sort often introduce novels that none of the above studies includes. Frank L. Mott's *Golden Multitudes* (1947), a history of best-selling literature of all types, devotes considerable space to novels that sold very well and exhibit coherent attitudes toward life in the city. A short chapter, for example, is given to Charles Sheldon's *In His Steps* (1896), a very important fictional mirror of the Social Gospel movement. Mott's book is a fascinating look at literary fads of all sorts, including popular magazines, children's books, and popular poetry. But even more valuable to a study such as this is James D. Hart's *The Popular Book* (1950), an investigation covering roughly the same works as *Golden Multitudes* but with the emphasis on best-sellers' reflection of their age. Hart considers Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), for example, in the context of the social issues of the eighties and nineties. Most important, he also brings up other novels that may be forgotten today but played large parts in the social and cultural temper of their times. John Hay's *The Breadwinners* (1884), Joaquin Miller's *The Destruction of Gotham* (1886), Elizabeth S. P. Ward's *A Singular Life* (1894), and Paul L. Ford's *The Honorable Peter Stirling* (1894) all reflect the intense economic questions of these years. *The Popular Book* also does a fine job of tracing the simultaneous mass craving for both romance and reform works during this period: in the

same year that Sinclair's *The Jungle* was a best-seller, the public was also buying Zane Grey's *The Spirit of the Border* and F. M. Crawford's *A Lady of Rome*. Hart's point is that popular novels clearly mirror two dominant forces of this period, capitalistic enterprise and humanitarian concern for society's unfortunates, in their simplest, most compelling terms.

For the present study I have culled literary histories, economic appraisals, and critical assessments of city fiction for slum novelists who are mentioned in footnotes but seldom treated at any length. Each novel either details the lives of slum dwellers or focuses on charity workers attempting to improve those lives. The term *slum* will be broadly considered to include the worst New York tenement districts that harbored the masses of unemployed, diseased, and criminal, as well as the less squalid but still unsanitary quarters of unskilled labor. In this first chapter the facts of slum life between 1890 and 1910 will be presented as they appear in current historical assessments and in contemporary descriptions. The second chapter will discuss thirty-one novels that attempt to depict this slum reality in one way or another. And the third considers twenty-six other novels that seem to offer solutions to the actual problems of unemployment, poor wages, and sub-standard living conditions. The main emphasis throughout will be on how the portrayals of the slum compare to the actualities of tenement life, and on what identifiable attitudes toward the slum the authors thus imply. Since major novelists either ignored the slum or transformed it into a deeply serious literature of ideas or characterization, these lesser works that sold well or strove to do so must be relied upon to give clear fictional pictures of the most common American attitudes toward the slum during these years. Because of the scarcity and unreliability of sales figures,

however, I will make no attempt to compare the selling records of these novels, except to note the score or so that were the most easily identifiable successes.[1]

The American Slum, 1890-1910

This investigation covers the same years Jane Addams wrote about in *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (1910), a period representing the epitome of worsening nineteenth century slum conditions. Addams spent this time in successful settlement work and then wrote a classic study of the experience, indications that by then the slum was recognized well enough to receive serious attention. One hundred years earlier such work would have been largely unnecessary. The 1800 Federal census showed only six American cities with a population over 8,000, and a total of only 210,873 urbanites. From 1800 on, however, a steady growth in the number and size of cities took place, with the expansion turning into an explosion after the Civil War. By 1890 the number of cities over 8,000 had jumped to 448, a total urban population of 18,284,385 residents. In the eighties alone the number of urban areas increased by 162.[2]

The cause of this expansion, the burgeoning industrial system, was also doubling and redoubling its might. In only six years at the turn of the century, the number and worth of American corporations quintupled.[3] Naturally enough, not all the millions of new city dwellers shared

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[1]See the Appendix, "Selections from the *Bookman* Monthly Sales Lists."

[2]A. F. Weber, "The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century," in Glaab, pp. 181, 184.

[3]Blake McKelvey, *The Urbanization of America* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1963), p. 42.

equally in the wealth being generated by the industrial economy. In fact, the most immediate result of urban and industrial growth was the disparity in living conditions between the economically successful businessmen, on one hand, and unemployed or underpaid workers, on the other. As Arthur M. Schlesinger notes in *The Rise of the City*,

> against the splendors of Fifth Avenue and the show places of the metropolis had to be set the rocky wastes of Shantytown, extending during the 1880's along the East Side from Forty-Second to One Hundred and Tenth Street and inhabited by Irish squatters, goats and pigs living promiscuously together.[1]

And this was by no means a new phenomenon. As early as 1857 a commission in New York found its city slums as deplorable as any social worker would discover one hundred years later. The commission report unrelentingly describes the horrors of slum life.

> Here, in sad refutation of utopian speculation, the leper crouches in dumb despair, the beggar crawls in abject misery, the toiler starves, the robber prowls, and the tenant-house--home of all those outcaste human beings--rises in squalid deformity, to mock civilization with its foul malaria, its poison-breeding influences, its death dealing associations.[2]

Although it would be twenty years before widely publicized investigations became common enough to bring the slum permanent notoriety, by 1900 the problem could no longer be ignored. At that time 1,500,000 people in New York City lived in 43,000 ill-ventilated, poorly-lighted, filthy, five-story tenements.[3] And in other major cities, most notably Chicago and Boston, conditions were the same.

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[1]Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Rise of the City* (New York, 1933), p. 84.

[2]"Report of the Select Committee Appointed to Examine Into the Conditions of Tenement Houses in New York and Brooklyn," in Glaab, p. 267.

[3]Schlesinger, p. 110.

An effective solution to this problem was made less likely by the nature of the slum dwellers themselves. The vast majority of these new city residents came from either rural America or Europe and so had little experience with the congested, confusing way of life they immediately encountered in larger cities. Nevertheless, they flocked to American cities by the millions in the second half of the nineteenth century, seeking a more exciting, more financially rewarding way of life or fleeing religious persecution and economic hardship abroad. Urban historian Blake McKelvey estimates that between 1880 and 1910 at least eleven million Americans migrated from farms and small towns to larger cities. In addition, the movement of Negroes into the cities had already begun around the turn of the century. By 1910 blacks represented only two percent of the population in New York and Chicago, but as high as fifteen to twenty-eight percent in Washington and Baltimore, and from thirty-three to forty percent in Southern industrial centers such as Atlanta and Birmingham.[1] Further, the first decade of the new century saw over eight million immigrants enter this country, compared with two and a half million in the 1850's.[2] Though many of these new Americans were literate, educated members of their native societies, they were at a loss to cope with the language and cultural barriers this country presented. They were less well-equipped than even the millions of rural Americans who made their way to the cities. And to complicate their lives further, the hordes of immigrants around 1900 found that the old Western frontiers, previously the heart of America's promise to

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[1] McKelvey, pp. 63, 68.

[2] Charles A. Beard and Others, *The Beards' New Basic History of the United States* (Garden City, New York, 1960), p. 387.

Europe's poor, were now virtually closed; consequently, these Europeans joined restless native Americans in looking to the cities for a decent new life.

The housing of this multitude of new city dwellers was based on multiple-family buildings known as tenements. These structures ranged from two-story frame houses converted to living quarters for more than one family, to five-story brick edifices divided into forty or more small apartments. Schlesinger describes the typical larger tenement in New York:

> The bleak narrow structure ran ninety feet back from the street, being pierced through the center by a stygian hallway less than three feet wide. Each floor was honeycombed with rooms, many without direct light or air and most of them sheltering one or more families. Almost at once such barracks became foul and grimy, infested with vermin and lacking privacy and proper sanitary conveniences. The sunless, ill-smelling air shafts at the sides of the building proved a positive menace during fires by insuring the rapid spread of flames. In rooms and hallways, on stairs and fire escapes, in the narrow streets, dirty half-clad children roamed at will, imbibing soiled thoughts from soiled surroundings. The dense slum district bounded by Cherry, Catherine, Hamilton and Market streets was known as "lung block" because of the many deaths from tuberculosis.[1]

While these city homes originally may have been roomy, as population increased landlords crowded greater numbers of people into them so as to increase the rent return. Smaller houses were moved to the rear of lots to provide space for the large brick structures. Thus two, three, or more families could continue to live in the wooden units as dozens of new families moved into the bigger tenements. In New York standard 25' x 100' lots eventually contained a single four- or five-story brick building and three or so ramshackle cottages in the rear, all of which

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[1]Schlesinger, pp. 109-110.

covered 86 to 90 percent of the lot.[1] Such intense overcrowding provoked the New York City investigation in 1857, a Federal committee in 1892, and another New York Tenement House Commission in 1895. The latter group's findings on rear tenements give a graphic statement of real slum conditions:

> Some of these rear buildings have but 18 inches of space between them, with windows opening from both buildings, from which garbage and all sorts of refuse are thrown into the intervening space until the air becomes foul with the accumulation of organic matter, which is almost impossible to remove. This further emphasizes the necessity of the elimination of rear tenements and the granting of power to condemn houses of a dangerous character....It may be added that in one block thus mapped, with over 2,000 population, there is not a single bathtub in the entire block.[2]

Chicago and Boston contained similar slums. The 1900 population of one 221-acre area in Chicago was over 45,000, while in a town like Holyoke, Massachusetts, the same number of people had over 10,000 acres of living space.[3]

Descriptions of the slums during this period are bountiful. In addition to numerous committee reports, book-length studies by individuals are packed with statistics on population and living conditions like plumbing, lighting, and disease. Such a work is *Tenement Conditions in Chicago* (1901) in which Robert Hunter describes the nature of rear tenements:

> Sickness, epidemics, high death-rates, are universally more common in rear tenements than in other dwellings. In fact, almost all insanitary conditions are found in and about rear tenements. The houses are usually

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[1] James Ford and Others, *Slums and Housing* (Chicago, 1936), p. 187.

[2] Ford, p. 188.

[3] Robert Hunter, *Tenement Conditions in Chicago* (Chicago, 1901), p. 54.

> in bad repair, and are permitted to become damp and unwholesome. The front houses cut off the source of light, and the rooms are dark. These tenements are, as a rule, on an alley, with windows opening directly over manure and garbage boxes. In some the ground floor is used as a stable. The ill-smelling privies are near, and the filth of rear yards and alleys is all about.[1]

Hunter describes in even more unpleasant detail the plight of a family he visited.

> One day the writer visited the family of a man who had been prostrated by heat while at work with the street-paving gang. They were a family of seven, living in a two-room apartment of a rear tenement. The day was in August, and the sun beat down upon one unintermittently and without mercy. The husband had been brought home a few hours before, and the wife, in a distracted but skilful [*sic*] way, found pathways among the clamoring children. The air was steamy with a half-finished washing, and remnants of the last meal were still upon the table. A crying baby and the sick husband occupied the only bed. The writer had known before of five people sleeping in one bed, so he supposed the father and oldest child usually slept on the floor. As he watched the woman on that day he understood a little of what it meant to live in such contracted quarters. To cook and wash for seven, to nurse a crying baby broken out with heat, and to care for a delirious husband, to arrange a possible sleeping-place for seven, to do all these things in two rooms which open upon an alley, tremulous with heated odors and swarming with flies from the garbage and manure boxes, was something to tax the patience and strength of a Titan. (pp. 62-63)

In New York a "Sanitary Aid Society" made careful note of its discoveries in 1887.

> To get into pestilential human rookeries you have to penetrate courts and alleys reeking with poisonous and malodorous gases, arising from accumulation of sewage and refuse scattered in all directions, and often flowing beneath your feet. You have to ascend rotten staircases, which threaten to give way beneath every step, and which in some places have already broken down, leaving gaps that imperil the limbs and lives of the unwary. You have to grope your way along dark and filthy passages swarming with vermin. Then,

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[1]Hunter, p. 36.

> if you are not driven back by the intolerable stench, you may gain admittance to the dens in which thousands of human beings herd together. Walls and ceilings are black with the accretions of filth, which have gathered upon them through long years of neglect. It is exuding through cracks in the boards overhead; it is running down the walls; it is everywhere. What goes by the name of a window is half stuffed with rags or covered by boards to keep out wind and rain; the rest is so begrimed and obscured that scarcely any light can enter or anything be seen from the outside. Should you ascend to the attic, where at least some approach to fresh air might be expected from open or broken windows, you look out upon the roofs and ledges of lower tenements and discover that the sickly air which finds its way into the room has to pass over the putrefying carcases of dead cats or birds, or viler abomination still.[1]

The most moving evidence of slum conditions, however, is in the photographs of this period. Amid its tables, charts, and descriptions, Hunter's book contains a number of startling slum pictures. In one of a rear tenement (p. 39) a boy of about five crouches in the foreground, with a muddy, debris-ridden alley stretching out behind him. Brick and frame houses stand jammed together down one side of the alley, while crude wooden outhouses and garbage barrels line the other. The word "fuck" is scrawled on one privy. Another picture (p. 63) presents a view of two small tenement rooms. Clothing is scattered about and beds and chests occupy most of the floor space. The center of attention, however, is a group of four grim, dirty looking adults and three children huddled around a sewing machine, possibly the family's main means of support.

A most remarkable group of slum photographs is collected in *American Album* published by *American Heritage* in 1968. One picture[2] shows drab,

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[1]Marcus T. Reynolds, *The Housing of the Poor in American Cities* (1893; rpt. College Park, Maryland, 1969), p. 15.

[2]Oliver Jensen and Others, *American Album* (New York, 1968), pp. 242-243.

four-story warehouses and tenements clustered around a tower of the Brooklyn Bridge much as they do yet today. The New York skyline across the river is composed of similar buildings packed tightly together and extending as far as the eye can see. Another photo (pp. 252-253) is of a street scene in the New York Jewish ghetto. In about a hundred-foot section of Hester Street scores of people mill around a line of produce carts set up in front of the tenement buildings. Each brick structure is inches from the next with clothing-laden apartment windows and the dilapidated awnings of first floor merchants covering the entire picture. Street peddlers and tailors' shop signs give the setting some ethnic exoticism, but the main impression is of a teeming, chaotic neighborhood that barely offers the necessities of air and light.

Inadequacies of tenement living are thus presented with brutal frankness in reports and photographs of the times; statistics and descriptions of working conditions make clear that the reports and photographs are not unusual. The depression following the panic of 1893 left ten percent of the population unemployed,[1] and violent strikes did little to improve the workingman's lot. In 1904 Robert Hunter described "the more fortunate" workers as

> but a few weeks from actual distress when the machines are stopped. Upon the unskilled masses want is constantly pressing. As soon as employment ceases, suffering stares them in the face. They are the actual producers of wealth, who have no home nor any bit of soil which they may call their own. They are the millions who possess no tools and can work only by permission of another. In the main, they live miserably, they know not why. They work sore, yet gain nothing. They know the meaning of hunger and the dread of want. They love their wives and children. They try to retain their self-respect. They have some ambition.

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[1] McKelvey, *The Urbanization of America*, p. 148.

> They give to neighbors in need, yet they are themselves the actual children of poverty.[1]

If this assessment is overly subjective, Hunter's accompanying statistics are not. Various bureaus of labor and charity organizations estimated that $600-$700 a year was necessary for survival in New York City around 1900 (p. 51); but the wages of a garment worker who made vests, for example, amounted to only $375 (p. 349). In Massachusetts a bureau of labor found in 1885 that about $750 was the average annual expenditure of a family in that state, but that the wages of a Boston metal worker were only $585.[2] These figures are a telling indication of why child labor was such a serious problem in these years--all able family members sought employment. Any individual worker, according to these statistics, found it impossible to support a family on his own.

And all working people in these years contended with long hours, low wages, and a lack of insurance against or compensation for accidents. A typical industry demonstrating all these problems and employing large numbers of slum residents was that of clothing manufacture. In New York especially, sweatshops were the main source of work for thousands of Jewish and Italian slum dwellers. These operations were set up in tenement apartments stifling in summer, icy in winter, and always thronged with women at their machines. An 1893 report describes this use of tenement apartments:

> It is a frequent practice to let the rooms by day to the men and women who busy themselves making "tenement-made" clothing. The only limit to the number of persons thus accommodated is the seating capacity of the room. The demands of ventilation are disregarded,

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[1] Robert Hunter, *Poverty* (1904; rpt. New York, 1965), pp. 4-5.

[2] Reynolds, pp. 21-24.

> and the air, which was fetid in the morning from the nightly exhalations of its occupants, becomes saturated with germs from the unclean and often diseased bodies of the "sweaters" who breathe it again and again. This is continued day after day, until the room and all its contents reek with the accretions of filth accumulated during an indefinite period. The clothing made in these places is afterward exposed for sale in all parts of the city, and, when worn, meets us at every corner.[1]

All these unhappy facts of slum life were clearly evident in these two decades. In addition to slum investigators and historians, other less objective observers commented on tenement life during this time. B. O. Flower, for example, was one writer who published emotionally colored remarks that demonstrated a reaction similar to that of the period's popular novels. As editor of *The Arena* Flower discussed the New York slums of 1890 under such headings as "Uninvited Poverty," "The Rum Curse," "White Slaves of New York," and "Society's Exiles." He attacked slums as "reservoirs of physical and moral death,"[2] and isolated "poverty, rum, and masculine immorality"[3] as the worst traps for the poor,

> whose every day is darkened by fear; whose dreams are haunted by dread; whose life is a terrible nightmare in which his mind is constantly racked by a confused vision, wherein wife and children are starving or begging--sick, without necessary food or treatment--virtue sold to drive back starvation--shame and the Potter's Field are strongly mingled--a kaleidoscope view of possible horrors. And what makes this thought still more impressive is the stolid indifference displayed by wealth toward want that cries so loudly for work that it may not starve beneath the very eyes of the many-time millionaires.[4]

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[1] Reynolds, p. 32.

[2] B. O. Flower, "Society's Exiles," *The Arena*, IV (June, 1891), p. 37.

[3] "Editorial Notes," *The Arena*, III (February, 1891), p. 375.

[4] "Editorial Notes," *The Arena*, III (April, 1891), p. 633.

In addition to this concern about slum conditions Flower did suggest practical answers to this chaotic puzzle; beyond encouraging the mission houses springing up in England and America, he called for better distribution of food and clothing to the extremely needy; the establishment of boarding houses and industrial training schools, summer trips into the country for children, and the construction of model tenements. His observations and suggestions are often supported by photographs of slum dwellers in their homes, all of which helped introduce the real nature of the slum to many Americans who otherwise would never have had any contact at all with these unpleasant aspects of city life. Only the melodramatic tinge of Flower's prose raises questions about the objectivity of his reporting: he uses adjectives rather than statistics to convince his readers.

Two other studies do even more than Flower's articles to portray slum conditions in colorful, expository prose. Both by Hutchins Hapgood, these works were based on long periods of observation in New York's slums. *The Spirit of the Ghetto* (1909) deals with poverty-stricken Jews, some working in sweatshops, others contributing to Hebrew newspapers and writing poetry. The author's preface acknowledges the Jewish quarter as "the seat of the sweat-shop, the tenement house, where 'red-lights' sparkle at night, where the people are queer and repulsive,"[1] but makes it clear that the charm he feels in these people is what really interests him. That he focuses mostly on the intellectual and artistic leaders in the community also indicates the level of Hapgood's concern, even while he notes the extreme poverty most of these artists must endure. A typical and revealing section of the book deals with a Jewish artist, Jacob

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[1]Hutchins Hapgood, *The Spirit of the Ghetto* (New York, 1902), p. 5.

Epstein, whom Hapgood praises as one who "tells the truth about the Ghetto as he sees it"; but this man's subjects are ghetto residents "in their suffering picturesqueness" (p. 259). Similarly, *Types from City Streets* (1910) portrays many distinct slum characters: the "tough," the grafter, the shop girl, the hobo, and the petty thief. But again it concentrates on the colorful, bohemian slum figures and their patronizing attitudes toward the common slum resident. A sculptor, for example, describes the Bowery as a place where "the drama of life" is always near the surface, where people "are easily met who talk in terms of immediate emotion and passion, who lay themselves bare, who exhibit the 'real thing' in human character."[1] These two books are a good introduction to the way many writers of fiction as well as non-fiction deal with the slum reality: what is most notable about the slum is its exotic characters. Hapgood knows the facts of slum life, but he is much more impressed by the drama of suffering than the suffering itself, more interested in the slum dweller as a noble, romantic hero than as a man constantly threatened by a hostile, competitive environment.

Another writer attempting to reveal the slum reality in non-fiction was the journalist Jacob Riis, who did more than any other individual in these years to bring the slums to public notice. One of his works, *The Battle With the Slum*, was a best-seller in 1903. But his most influential book was *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), which runs the gamut of slum topics from the origins of tenements to efforts underway for reform. He covers the unique atmosphere of each major ethnic ghetto (Chinatown, Jewtown, and the Irish, Italian, and Negro quarters) and concentrates with special interest on the plight of New York's poor

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[1] *Types from City Streets* (New York, 1910), p. 375.

children. But today Riis's writings say more about the ambiguous quality of American concern for the slum at the time than about efforts to do away with the problem. His attention to colorful, pathetic children of the slums--"waifs" and "street arabs" he calls them--plus other emphases on the exotic appeal of slum residents rather than their suffering, indicates why the book was successful with the public. It does not uncover much that was startlingly new, nor does it go into much detail about questions of unemployment, immigrant problems, or mundane issues like poor plumbing and ventilation. Instead Riis uses the guise of an investigative reporter to exploit the natural, human curiosity about those who differ from the norm. His point of view becomes painfully clear whenever he attempts to deal with minority characteristics.

> The Italian is gay, light-hearted and, if his fur is not stroked the wrong way, inoffensive as a child.
>
> All attempts to make an effective Christian of John Chinaman will remain abortive in this generation.
>
> Poverty, abuse, and injustice alike the negro accepts with imperturbable cheerfulness.[1]

Neither the author nor, presumably, his many thousands of readers were particularly interested in the difficulties these ethnic groups had in finding a job or blending into the mainstream of American life. Rather, what was most fascinating about how the other half lived was the variety and strangeness of their ways.

Riis's semi-fictional *Children of the Tenements* (1897) contains a number of sketches, originally published in the *New York Evening Sun*, that illustrate this same uncertain attitude. Among these stories which

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[1]Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890; rpt. New York, 1957), pp. 41, 67, 115.

the author says are presented "just as they came to me fresh from the life of the people,"[1] one called "'Twas Liza's Doings" combines both of Riis's favorite story elements, poor tenement children and Christmas. When a deliveryman's mare stumbles on a horseshoe one Christmas eve, the man finds a quarter he hopes will bring him luck. During the night his long lost son returns home, sneaking into the barn to sleep until morning. The story concludes happily when a fire breaks out in the barn and the son is right on hand to save the delivery horse, Liza. Not all these stories are so cheery, but most do give a maudlin, emotion-laden picture of the bitter-sweet struggles of slum folk. Another more typically grim sketch deals with a suicide victim and why he decides to kill himself. "In a cityfull where every man had his place, he was a misfit with none" (p. 286). Riis's tart, atmospheric style is similar to that of William Sydney Porter's more sophisticated but just as sentimental stories of New York's poor. Riis recognizes the ugliness of life in the ghettos and is never afraid to discuss drunkenness, disease, or death in the slums. But no matter how severe the suffering, he is always able to find beauty in the most brutal situations, even if it means avoiding the real nature of the misery with which he is dealing. Describing the city in winter, for example, he notes the very obvious "hardships and toil" it imposes on the poor; but he describes the beauty of winter eloquently, concluding that if you claim

> that life is not worth living in America's metropolis even in winter, whatever the price of coal, ... I shall tell you that you are fit for nothing but treason, stratagem, and spoils; for you have no music in your soul. (p. 172)

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[1] *Children of the Tenements* (New York, 1904), p. v.

Riis ignores the many people he is writing about who do not have the price of coal and thus cannot enjoy winter's beauty around them. This oversight is especially dismaying in a journalist and non-fiction writer. In short story writers such as J. W. Sullivan, Alvan Sanborn, H. C. Bunner, or Edward W. Townsend such a treatment of slum problems is more common. But one does not look for a reporter investigating the slums to react with such stereotyped notions of races and classes or to interpret poverty in terms of its appearances rather than its effects on the poor. And illustrations included in his non-fiction study, *The Children of the Poor* (1892) confirm Riis's point of view as superficial. Along with photographs of slum citizens, the book also contains numerous sketches and paintings of rosy-cheeked children in fluffy native costumes. Idealized renditions of slum life are as valuable as the real thing for this author.

Other responses to the slum problem were perhaps more substantial. The settlement house movement, for example, was one humanitarian effort that fought worsening slum conditions during the depression in the nineties. Encouraged by the success of Toynbee Hall, a London settlement begun in 1883, many concerned Americans sought to alleviate the suffering of slum dwellers by founding city missions. Prior to 1890 only four settlements existed here, but by the middle of the decade the number jumped to fifty.[1] The most famous of these was Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago. And her *Twenty Years at Hull-House* provides a fine description of the slum reality, while still exhibiting as many value judgments as the work of Hapgood and Riis.

In relating her motives and goals Addams says Hull House was

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[1]Schlesinger, *The Rise of the City*, p. 352.

> an experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life in a great city....It is an attempt to relieve, at the same time, the over-accumulation at one end of society and the destitution at the other.[1]

This is an honest evaluation of the problem of slum life and a sincere dedication to action meant to solve it. But Addams' motives are not so easily summarized, for she was also interested in the training of cultivated young ladies fresh out of college. She wanted to offer a place where girls "who had been given over too exclusively to study, might restore a balance of activity along traditional lines and learn of life from life itself" (p. 85). Although meant as an aid for the poor, much of the Hull House routine simply involved these college girls trying to put their genteel manners and polite education into practice in the slum setting. Chapters called "Arts at Hull-House" and "Socialized Education," for example, indicate how lectures and art exhibits were considered valuable for the slum dweller. The purpose of art, the author says, was to "feed the mind of the worker, to lift it above the monotony of his task, and to connect it with the larger world" (p. 435). What a liberal education did for the well-to-do or middle-class American, she assumed it could also do for the unemployed worker. Addams took it for granted that the intellectual development of a poverty-stricken person was as important as his material needs. Such an attitude, similar to Hapgood's emphasis on slum artists rather than the ordinary slum citizen, tended to minimize the seriousness of urban poverty and blame it mostly on the inadequate education and inferior moral training of the poor, rather than on economic conditions.

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[1]Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House* (New York, 1910), pp. 125-126.

Yet another humanitarian activity during these years was the work of the Social Gospel clergymen, some of whom had very direct relationships to the slum life novel. Men like Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch preached and wrote about evils like the slum, bringing them to the attention of many church people who otherwise would have remained safely in the fold of the more traditional clergy. Reacting strongly to the accepted system of uncontrolled capitalistic enterprise, these two and others offered an interpretation of the Christian ethic that encouraged employers and workers to cooperate rather than compete and exploit. The solutions put forth by this movement ranged from the exhortation of church members to show more concern for the unfortunate, to the advocation of mild, socialistic reform. The most flamboyant and best remembered Social Gospel contributions, however, were made through the written word. Reverend Josiah Strong's *Our Country* (1885) and *The Twentieth Century City* (1898) dealt with the social aspects of Christianity and managed to become best-sellers. In 1894 the movement was sensationalized in William Stead's *If Christ Came to Chicago!*, a book in the style of traditional exposés that advocates an active concern for the poor. Along with chapters such as "Christ's Church in Chicago," and "What Would Christ Do in Chicago?", Stead details the city's corruption by listing the addresses of brothels, saloons, and pawn brokers on a map of the tainted neighborhoods. But by far the most successful author of the Social Gospel movement was Charles M. Sheldon, a Kansas minister who turned a series of sermons into one of the largest selling novels of all time, *In His Steps* (1896). Sheldon's contribution to the panoply of American attitudes toward the slum will be dealt with in Chapter III; suffice it to say here that his book was only one part of the new

awareness that some positive action had to be formulated to deal with the helter-skelter development of urbanization.

The intangible good accomplished in the slums by interested citizens like Riis, Addams, and Sheldon was in the nature of saving souls, building minds, improving outlooks, and otherwise entertaining residents of city ghettos. The valuable, tangible service they performed was actually to those outside the slums: when they wrote about their observations and described their experiences, they told a public in danger of being blinded by its own optimistic disinclination to confront ugly reality that slums and poor people existed. But beyond relaying this information, their often sentimental and uncritical attitudes probably encouraged an equivocal American response to the slum reality. While people undoubtedly were shocked by commission reports and were sympathetic to Addams' work, they still seemed mostly to prefer facing the slum in the idealized way it was given them by men like Hapgood and Riis.

American Fiction, 1890-1910

In 1890 American authors and their readers were more enchanted with the excitement and color of urban centers than dismayed by the increasing deterioration of part of those centers into slums. As noted, early Americans were ambivalent about what role cities should play in their civilization, but in the fiction toward the end of the century, the emphasis seemed to be definitely on the fascinating variety of city life rather than its hazards. Despite the forthright, pioneering efforts of writers like Mary E. W. Freeman and Sarah O. Jewett to describe the plight of rural New England folk, regional writers dealing with particular cities most often resorted to pleasant stereotypes and romantic plots. The short urban fiction of men like George W. Cable, William Sydney

Porter, George Ade, and H. C. Bunner begins to come to grips with the real people and manners of American cities; but too often it relies on non-realistic devices to keep the reader's interest. The clever urban dialogue in Ade's work and the colorful Creoles of Cable's fiction, for example, seem only superficial aspects of Chicago and New Orleans life. Even the underdogs and tramps in Porter's *The Four Million* (1902) must compete for the reader's attention with the author's experimental, fantastic plots. In "The Gift of the Magi," for example, the quaint lives of poor city dwellers are portrayed little differently than in the sketches of Riis and Hapgood: the bizarre lifestyles are the primary point of interest.

Few of the realistic pioneers in the novel did much honest investigation of the seamier side of life in American cities. William Dean Howells, in his concern that writers treat common experiences with honesty, still emphasized the "smiling aspects of life," and tended to bypass the kind of life in the city which has been described above.

A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890) meticulously lays out the urban setting in the Marches' five-chapter search for an apartment. And the social conflicts of the time are well reproduced in the subplots involving the socialist Lindau, the capitalist Dryfoos, and his labor-leaning son, Conrad. But other than Lindau, a character embodying an idea, none of the participants lives in the slum nor has much contact with those who do. Nor, in fact, does the slum even play any real role in the novel, despite the urban setting and the attention to labor problems throughout. Rather, the point of view of Howells and his genteel hero, Basil March, is one of interested observation of the slum. March's thoughts as he strolls by accident through a New York slum seem to touch the edges of a hard reality Howells usually tried to avoid.

> The whole at moments seemed to him lawless, Godless; the absence of intelligent, comprehensive purpose in the huge disorder and the violent struggle to subordinate the result to the greater good penetrated with its dumb appeal the consciousness of a man who had always been too self-enwrapt to perceive the chaos to which the individual selfishness must always lead.[1]

But Howells himself was not inclined to handle such chaos either. Despite the fine urban atmosphere in much of the novel, he does not confront the ugliest part of the Marches' New York, the slums.

Other first-rate writers advancing the realist cause during these twenty years also seemed fascinated by urban themes while still avoiding the slum problem. Frank Norris goes far in reproducing the real atmosphere of San Francisco in *McTeague* (1899), despite his concern for the uncommon and "romantic": the pathetic dentist wandering blindly through his daily routine seems caught in a terrible mechanistic web that could be spun only in a city. But even the gritty texture of McTeague's surroundings and the low life characters, Maria Macapa and Zerkow, do not make this a slum novel; it is rather a work of deterministic characterization that focuses on personality and motivation rather than relationships between the characters and their environment. Likewise, the slum setting early in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) does not turn out to play a vital role in the story; instead, the emphasis is again on the instincts and struggles of a single character. These works qualify as "city novels" according to Blanche H. Gelfant: the city creates an "atmosphere," a "way of life," and is more of an actual participant than mere background.[2]

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[1]William Dean Howells, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890; rpt. New York, 1965), p. 160.

[2]Blanche H. Gelfant, *The American City Novel* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1954), pp. 4-5.

City novels though they be, attitudes about the slum are not very clearly revealed, for slum life simply does not play the active role in them that general urban settings do.

The attitude of major writers toward topics like the slum can be seen in the secretive manner David Graham Phillips felt he had to work on *Susan Lenox* in the first decade of the new century. This novel, unpublished until 1917, concerns itself with even more controversial material than Phillips' usual fictional castigations of corrupt businessmen and politicians. Through two long volumes the heroine makes her way from the dullness of village life, where she is spurned for being born out of wedlock, to the trials of prostitution in New York. Because of the breadth of the story and Phillips' intense concentration on the character of Susan, this work actually transcends the category of slum fiction much as does *Sister Carrie*. Rather than the slum setting itself, the main interest is on Susan's struggles to overcome society's short-sighted judgments and climb to the upper class. And like Carrie Meeber, she eventually finds success in a stage career, thus justifying the author's admiration for her strong, stalwart nature.

Along the way to this triumph Phillips occasionally devotes some space to portraying the lives of tenement dwellers, even if his heroine never does quite sink to their level. He spares few details in presenting the grimness of Susan's life with a family of factory workers in Cincinnati. Along with the brutishness the family is driven to, including their off-hand acceptance of incest as an unavoidable fact of their surroundings, he also notes the vivid shock of such a life on Susan's inexperienced character:

> It was a sad, sad puzzle. If one ought to be good--chaste and clean in mind and body--then, why was there the most tremendous pressure on all but a few

> to make them as foul as the surroundings in which they were compelled to live? If it was wiser to be good, then why were most people imprisoned in a life from which they could escape only by being bad? What was this thing comfortable people had set up as good, anyhow--and what was bad? She found no answer. How could God condemn anyone for anything they did in the torments of the hell that life revealed itself to her as being, after a few weeks of its moral, mental and physical horrors?....Those who realized what life really was and what it might be, those who were sensitive took to drink or went to pieces some other way, if they were gentle, and if they were cruel, committed any brutality, and crime to try to escape.[1]

Other passages in this thousand-page work are equally uncompromising in their picture of the real horrors of slum life. Five hundred pages after the above, Susan reflects on the slum she is leaving behind as she begins her show business career:

> Susan's nostrils were filled with the stenches of animal and vegetable decay--stenches descending in heavy clouds from the open windows of the flats and from the fire escapes crowded with all manner of rubbish; stenches from the rotting, brimful garbage cans; stenches from the groceries and butcher shops and bakeries where the poorest qualities of food were exposed to contamination of swarms of disgusting fat flies, of mangy, vermin-harassed children and cats and dogs; stenches from the never washed human bodies, clad in filthy garments and drawn out of shape by disease and toil. Sore eyes, scrofula, withered arm or leg, sagged shoulder, hip out of joint--There, crawling along the sidewalk, was the boy whose legs had been cut off by the street car; and the stumps were horribly ulcered. And there at the basement window drooled and cackled the fat idiot girl whose mother sacrificed everything always to dress her freshly in pink. What a world!--where a few people--such a few!--lived in health and comfort and cleanliness--and the millions lived in disease and squalor, ignorant, untouched of civilization save to wear its caste-off clothes and to eat its castaway food and to live in its dark noisome cellars!--And to toil unceasingly to make for others the good things of which they had none themselves! It made

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[1]David Graham Phillips, *Susan Lenox* (1917; rpt. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 1968), I, 344-345.

> her heartsick--the sadder because nothing could be done about it. Stay and help? As well stay to put out a conflagration bare-handed and alone. (II, 331-332)

The slum is an important part of Phillips' characterization of Susan and little in the main novels of this study ever approaches the intensity of the above sections. Unlike most fiction attempting to reflect ghetto life, *Susan Lenox* transforms its slum material into moving, realistic fiction rather than exploiting it for the sake of a sentimental or adventuresome story. The slum is consciously used to further the investigation of Susan's personality, not simply as colorful, exotic amusement. And as such, this novel represents well the fate of a fully mature and completely successful slum novel: it leaves the category of slum fiction behind and becomes a literary achievement that cannot be so summarily classified.

Another writer who translated slum material into meaningful fiction was Jack London. London was perhaps more familiar with the realities of slum life than any other author during these years and wanted to use this knowledge in his stories and novels. *John Barleycorn* (1913) tells of his working class background and such incidents as his disillusionment upon learning he could not advance immediately to the position of electrician in an Oakland power plant. This experience left London with a lasting impression of the inhuman labor the unskilled worker performed for a living wage. He shows similar understanding of the poor in other nonfiction, most notably *The People of the Abyss* (1903), a study of poverty in London, England. And he applies all this first-hand knowledge in fiction like "The Apostate" (1906), "South of the Slot" (1909), and *The Iron Heel* (1907).

The second of these stories is a particularly good example of how London transforms the slum setting. In it a professor of sociology becomes involved in his slum study to the point of losing his academic

identity there and assuming the role of a coarse, earthy worker. In the end he must choose between his genteel fiancée from the academic world and a feminist union worker he meets while a workingman. He is about to decide on the first girl when he accidentally comes upon a strike scene in her company, cannot control himself, and bursts forth in his worker role to fight with the police. Thus, London uses the slum as a vehicle for his ideas: he is more concerned with how the slum can reveal the vital "beast" beneath a civilized veneer than he is with the slum itself.

The Iron Heel also demonstrates the predominance in London of ideas over sheer depiction of surface reality. Similar to the labor novels of the slums to be discussed in Chapter Three, this work presents leaders of the people striving to change society on behalf of the overworked masses. But three things separate *The Iron Heel* from the plethora of other fiction on the slum laborer's problems: first, London's skill as a writer gives this novel a depth that few writers on the slum could match; second, the form of a worker's diary telling of attempted revolts against a fascist government in the future lends a parable-like quality to the novel and gives it ironic connections to utopian fiction; and third, the technique of supporting the diary with elaborate footnotes added after a successful revolt even further in the future, contributes to the story's realistic texture and is evidence of London's minute concern for his subject. The labor and settlement house novels in Chapter Three will be seen usually to develop this type of story as simply a variation on the slum tale of romance and sentiment--an idealistic labor leader replaces the struggling child of the streets as the typical hero.

Stephen Crane was another major literary figure to write about the slum between 1890 and 1910. Crane not only set his stories in the slums and used slum residents for characters, but to the dismay of most of his

contemporaries, he let his slum folk play out their sordid, petty dramas without interference or comment. But most important, as many critics have pointed out, Crane's slum stories are as much about the American culture at large as they are strictly about the slum environment itself. *Maggie* (1893) is another example of fiction that uses the facts of slum life for broader ends than most popular novels. One example of the relative complexity of Crane's motives is the opening sentence in Chapter Five, "The girl, Maggie, blossomed in a mud puddle."[1] As it turns out, Maggie is anything but a flower, and the image of her blooming in Rum Alley is ironic. Such a description of a heroine is suited more to the traditionally sweet, young girls that populated the reading matter of the day and to those who consumed it. Maggie's environment places her so far from this innocent ideal that the picture of her "blossoming" is sharply incongruous. Yet many slum novels with young, poverty-stricken heroines such as Maggie use similar imagery on a literal level; in fact, so prevalent are female slum characters who transcend their ugly surroundings that the term "flower in the mud" can be used to describe them. Magazine fiction and novels during these years were overloaded with pure youngsters growing up totally uninfluenced by the grime and moral corruption of their neighborhoods. Although never definitely established, it seems possible that Crane was specifically mocking the sentimental slum stories of his time with this irony in *Maggie*.

At the very least, Crane was making fun of the flimsy moral dogmas of the day. Maggie's chivalric ideas of love and her mother's rigid notions of decency at the book's end are typical of the genteel codes of conduct set forth in popular romances read by proper young ladies. It appalled Crane that these over-civilized standards should be so widespread in a period when life's brutal reality was making them hollow and obsolete.

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[1]Stephen Crane, *Bowery Tales*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1969), p. 24.

"George's Mother" likewise exposes an inadequate, sentimental morality of ideals as the high hopes of George Kelcy and the piety of his mother are demolished by the boy's drinking. Nothing in the beliefs they or Maggie have received from the dominant culture prepares them to handle the reality of their world; yet the only moral tools they possess *are* those they see and imitate in the classes above them.

A few of the novels to be treated here did have intentions as serious as London's in *The Iron Heel* or Crane's in *Maggie*. Authors such as Reginald W. Kauffman, Paul L. Dunbar, Abraham Cahan, and Upton Sinclair did comment honestly on the meaning of the slum in American culture, and thus invested their works with a substance lacking in most slum fiction. But most of these books neglected any thoughtful response to the slum question and concentrated on inoffensive, pleasant stories meant to sell well. Because of this motivation I have called them "popular" novels: even if they were not all outstanding best-sellers, most were consciously a part of the American literary tradition of romance, melodrama, and adventure that was coming under attack by realism. These authors of slum novels typically wrote only one or two works of this type, with undistinguished love stories making up the remainder of their often voluminous output. Edward W. Townsend, in addition to fanciful tales of slum children, also wrote a number of polite society novels detailing well-bred young ladies' affairs of the heart. And Cleveland Moffett, who wrote an action-packed novel of slum labor problems, was most famous for his detective stories. These writers had little intention of contributing to realistic literature or of reacting seriously to a real problem of American life. Rather, their slum novels were most often a part of a larger, amorphous body of romances aiming to amuse, not to enlighten. And when they did occasionally attempt to write about such realities as the slum, they repeatedly treated

them in the established, romantic manner. As will be seen next, their slum novels exhibit a strikingly incongruous combination: a subject matter inspired by the well-known tenement conditions but a presentation in the idealized formulas of romantic fiction.

CHAPTER TWO

SLUM LIFE AS FICTIONAL SUBJECT MATTER

Publicized by exposés, commission reports, and magazine editorials, the slum was a well-established fact of American life by 1890. The first noteworthy novel to reflect this new concern was an English work, *Robert Elsmere* (1888), by Mrs. Humphrey Ward. An immediate and much discussed best-seller in America as well as England, this novel tells of a young minister who begins to lose his faith under the pressure of the new scientific thought. One result of his questionings is that he gives up traditional preaching and goes off to work with the poor in London's slums. A tame topic today, this theme caused a raging controversy in the late eighties, with public figures such as Gladstone (against) and Oliver Wendell Holmes (for) joining in the debate, as the book's sales figures skyrocketed in England and America. *Robert Elsmere* raised social and economic questions, suggested the church could lead society in delving into these questions, and was an outstanding financial success at the same time.

The authors of the twenty-nine novels to be discussed in this chapter undoubtedly were aware of the success of *Robert Elsmere* in translating the issue of slum life into popular fiction. But the first twenty-two works I will consider all fall distinctly short of the honest concern for the slum displayed in Mrs. Ward's novel. Instead, they employ various non-realistic modes in which to tell their stories of ghetto life. Some might be termed "comedies" presenting the slum as a

background for the humorous exploits of obviously stereotyped urban characters; others are fictionalized exposés purporting to deal with criminals or petty slum politicians; still others are simple "romances" focusing on the imagined lives, loves, and successes of quaint tenement folk. Seven of the twenty-nine novels, however, do go somewhat further than such sentimental, exaggerated portrayals in giving more accurate and sympathetic treatment to slum dwellers and their living conditions.

Preparatory to confronting the twenty-two non-realistic slum novels, certain descriptive passages from them and from others only peripherally concerned with the slum will be examined. These descriptions picture tenement life in its most inaccurate light and demonstrate an unwillingness to treat this material in any other than a dramatic vein meant to entertain rather than enlighten the reader. Like the non-fiction of Hapgood and Riis, these depictions put forth the colorful pageant of slum life in a way that will appeal to the average reader's curiosity about those lurking in the city's shadows of whom he has no knowledge whatsoever. The opening of I. K. Friedman's novel of humble tenement folk, *Poor People* (1900), is typical. He sets the slum scene with a four-page introductory "Proem" that pictures the ghetto as "drab, cheerless, and dreary" but a place of melodramatic action. Of a particular tenement he says,

> innumerable the rains and the winds that have beaten and browned its forlorn frame; endless the sordid tragedies that have strutted with buskined foot gloomily across its narrow stage; and the petty comedies of three generations have awakened hollow laughter in its grimy halls.[1]

But this is not real grime or real suffering. Rather, it is quite

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[1] I. K. Friedman, *Poor People* (Boston, 1900), p. 1.

obviously a picturesque kind of fantasy in which dirt and poverty are fascinating. Fortunately, Friedman does not maintain this exaggerated tone in the body of the novel; his flamboyant beginning is merely an extreme example of the romantic portrayals of the slum setting. But his approach is not atypical: many authors use such vivid passages to arouse interest and excitement. In closing this "Proem" Friedman talks about the slum as a "dark, dank, and gloomy" mine in which workers slave on hopelessly; but all is not absolutely depressing, for

> in the forbidding depths of the mine are hid glittering nuggets of pure gold, and to him who diggeth deep and diligently shall be given. (pp. 3-4)

A social worker in Edward W. Townsend's romantic *Maggie*-like novel, *A Daughter of the Tenements* (1895), encounters the same sort of enchantment in a filthy slum scene. A long description of the worker's penetration into the slum begins with these exciting lines.

> The gossip of the women, the strange cries of the vendors, the shouts of the children were all animated, light-hearted; the dress, even the rags of the poorest, were bright-colored, and the marvellous things they sold lent attractiveness to the scene; the glinting bronze of the open kegs of humble herrings, the scarlet of ropes of peppers, the green of barrels of olives; the gleaming white and purple of onions; the silver shining fresh fish heaped high in wagon-loads; the cords of high-stacked monster loaves of bread in every shade of brown; the almost startling degree and variety of color in the open booths where women's shawls, children's stockings, and men's neckerchiefs were displayed and offered for sale by women who laughed as they bantered their neighbors.[1]

Townsend's sparkling description of the slum is consistent with his usual handling of city life in his other novels. In *A Summer in New York* (1903), for example, the genteel heroine reacts to the city crowds and noise with well-mannered revulsion. A tale of society love like this, which

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[1]Edward Townsend, *A Daughter of the Tenements* (New York, 1895), p. 59.

describes the slum in terms of "the gay companionship of the marketplace" (p. 11), reveals Townsend as primarily a romantic storyteller. Such descriptions seem patently dishonest when compared to evidence like the ghetto photographs noted in Chapter One.

Another outstandingly romantic description of a squalid urban setting appears in Ernest Poole's *The Voice of the Street* (1906). Crowds of workers scurry about in the New York rush hour:

> The street was racing and straining; it seemed to suck in all the crowds and sweep them on; with eyes fixed they hurried and raced as they had raced the mad day long. The street was fascinating. Lights gleamed from a thousand windows, from towers, from twentieth stories, from sparkling signs hung high in blue and red incandescents, from pawnshops, lunch-rooms, cafes and saloons, from trolleys and street stands, from trains high up in the air and from holes that led into the subway. The roar was glorious! Nothing tired or sad or sentimental here; it was gay, throbbing, jerking, laughing, vibrating and thrilling with life. Life strung high!...And as fitting music to it all, a big street piano jerked out the quick nervous throbbing of rag-time. The street laughed and sparkled and swore, the street roared![1]

The impoverished young hero stands by and soaks up this exciting atmosphere much as does Dreiser's Carrie Meeber. According to both authors the city is a swirling, intense jungle. As in the previous descriptions, the amusement is alluringly glamorous: the surface of a cheerless, even unsavory city setting is presented in captivating, appealing detail that seems to reflect a shallow, one-dimensional attitude. In Poole's novel, as in Dreiser's, this limited view is only that of the main character, but in most romantic slum novels the author himself shares the idealized outlook.

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[1]Ernest Poole, *The Voice of the Street* (New York, 1906), p. 2.

Major characters in two other novels describe their fascinated reactions to the slum much like Poole's hero. In the first, Charles Dudley Warner's *The Golden House* (1894), a well-to-do lady of high society visits a slum and understands immediately the deprivation there, but lacks real feeling for the deprived. She is favorably impressed by the spirit slum dwellers seem to maintain: poor conditions are

> acquiesced in as the natural order,...Perhaps that which made the deepest impression on her was the fact that such conditions of living could seem natural to those in them, and that they could get so much enjoyment of life in situations that would have been simple misery to her.[1]

Whether her view reflects Warner's own is debatable, but any assumption that the poor are content in their misery seems possible only through limited contact with poverty. Although it better recognizes the unpleasant slum reality than the previously quoted passages, this outlook still remains detached and uncommitted to a full understanding of tenement life. Such is the attitude of many characters in the fiction of these years, especially when their contact with the slum is temporary and cursory.

Another novel with an elaborate description of a slum is Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen's *Social Strugglers* (1893). This work contains a nine-page "slumming party," a turn of the century pastime of upper-class urbanites. Two daughters of a newly rich New York tycoon are taken first through the more respectable sections of town, then into the slums. There the girls encounter people they never imagined existed, people whose

> faces spoke of privations, sordid effort, and passions easily unleashed. But to Maud, as to Peggy, they were on that account no less interesting. They had the

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[1]Charles Dudley Warner, *The Golden House* (New York, 1894), p. 34.

> sensation of sitting in a high-priced box, looking out upon a play which had been gotten up for their benefit, and pity was not their uppermost feeling. Even the children, who held out their hands to them, asking for "fiva centa," and the women, who sent volleys of sonorous but happily unintelligible observations after them, seemed to be separated from them by invisible footlights, and to be part of the play. It was so extremely novel to see people in this grave, silent, and Puritanical land of ours so joyous, so pictorially demonstrative, living expressive, conversational lives, full of flourish, plasticity, and happy irresponsibility.[1]

The tone here clearly indicates Boyesen's lack of sympathy for these young ladies, and when the party later encounters hostile, unexpected jeers from slum residents, his intentions are unmistakable. But before the girls are so rudely shocked by the players in this pageant turning on them, they are enchanted with the quaint slum scenes. Riding through in their carriage, "standing like breathless exclamation points, full of supressed amazement" (p. 263), taking in the color spread out before them, these sisters display the most typical reaction of characters in romantic slum fiction. The slum is a lively amusement of diversion and the residents happy, contented jesters. Since this point of view *is* pleasing, readers must have found these scenes entertaining. But none of them comes to grips with realities such as death and disease or even with the day-to-day monotony of crowded, unsanitary living quarters.

In the twenty-two main novels now to be considered, plots and characterizations are usually as shallow and sentimental as simple descriptions of the slum's appearance. Comic novels in particular distorted slum life for the sake of entertainment. Little about the slum at this time was humorous, but many different writers approached it through comic modes. The newspaper comic strip came of age in the mid-nineties with a

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[1]Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen, *Social Strugglers* (New York, 1893), pp. 263-264.

series of slum life cartoons by Richard Outcault in the Sunday *New York World.*[1] In the popular theater not only were melodramas and variety shows successful, but comedies of city life such as *Lost In New York* were also presented.[2] Vaudeville often dealt with the amusing situations arising when a country bumpkin migrated to the city to make his fortune. All these forms of humor were meant to entertain the city dweller and take his mind from the stress of his daily routine; it seems only natural in doing so that the characters and events would be more exaggerated than realistic.

The comic urban novels present little besides stereotyped pictures of slum residents and their lives. Finley Peter Dunne's *Mr. Dooley in Peace and in War* (1898) and a stream of succeeding books provide only witty comments on the times by a colorful Irish bartender. What Mr. Dooley's views lack in depth of understanding is made up for by their amusing accents and wise, common-sense tone:

> "Sometimes I think they'se poison in th' life iv a big city. Th' flowers won't grow here no more thin they wud in a tannery, an' th' bur-rds have no song; an' th' childher iv dacint men an' women come up hard in th' mouth an' with their hands raised again their kind."[3]

Mr. Dooley uses this pat response to explain a neighbor's boy running afoul of the law. The evil effects of a slum environment are summarized in catchy clichés.

Two other popular but thin characters of urban life were Potash and Perlmutter, created by Montague Glass. These Jewish businessmen in the

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[1]Russel Nye, *The Unembarrassed Muse* (New York, 1970), p. 216.

[2]Foster R. Dulles, *A History of Recreation* (New York, 1965), p. 218.

[3]Finley Peter Dunne, *Mr. Dooley in Peace and in War* (Boston, 1898), p. 125.

New York garment industry are as limited in their ideas about city life as Dunne's Irish bartender. In discussing whether or not to invest in a tenement, for example, Morris Perlmutter reminds his partner of the advantages such a venture has over the "cloak and suit business":

> "There ain't no seasons in real estate, Abe. A tenement house this year is like a tenement house last year, Abe, also the year before. They ain't wearing strips in tenement houses one year, Abe, and solid colors the next. All you do when you got a tenement house, Abe, is to go round and collect the rents."[1]

Both Glass and Dunne use their humor for ironic commentaries on urban life. And such wry assessments must have appealed to a mass audience seeking relief from realities like the slum. Potash and Perlmutter helped Americans think of urban life in much more palatable terms than straightforward slum committee reports.

One of the most noteworthy urban humorists during this period was George Ade. Like Dunne and Glass, Ade found that humorous treatments of slum themes and characters were highly profitable. Two of his novels, *Artie* and *Pink Marsh*, were on the best-seller lists in 1896 and 1897. Like his *Fables in Slang*, these novels are about ninety percent dialogue and more fascinating for their reproductions of flashy contemporary speech than for their serious attitude toward city life. Ade's Artie Blanchard, for example, is a Chicago dandy who perfectly reflects this slick, waggish manner. Coming to work with a hangover, Artie quips,

> "I've got a set o' coppers on me this g.m. that'd heat a four-room flat and my mouth tastes like a Chinese family'd just moved out of it."[2]

Ade's only character who in any way reflects the life of Chicago's poor

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[1]Montague Glass, *Potash and Perlmutter* (Garden City, New York, 1909), p. 83.

[2]George Ade, *Artie: A Story of the Streets and Town* (Chicago, 1896), p. 76.

is Pink Marsh, in the novel by that name published in 1897. Pink is a stereotype of the urban black man, a shuffling shoeshine "boy" who scrounges for a tip and struggles to pronounce words like procrastinate: "pocazzumalashum--prasticanashum...pocrastamulation."[1] His straight man is "the morning customer" who comes to the barbership regularly to listen to Pink's witticisms. But Pink Marsh is another caricature, a one-dimensional figure valuable only as a reflection of a middle-class concept of a poor black. Created by a white journalist for well-off white readers, Pink Marsh not only provides amused chuckles but assures the reader that black people are carefree, happy entertainers of successful whites. Much of Pink's droll patter, in fact, capitalizes on this limited view of himself and blacks generally. He makes much of his certainty that black men dance better than whites (because they have fewer bones, more loosely connected) and that blacks have skulls an inch thick, but supersensitive shinbones that are more susceptible than those of whites. In short, Pink Marsh is a whimsical portrayal that inadvertently reveals the author's and readers' narrow conceptions of the Negro.

Many other slum comedies use children as major characters. In Roy L. McCardell's *Jimmy Jones, The Autobiography of an Office Boy* (1907), Jimmy is a jaunty slum lad similar to Ade's Artie. He rises from a tenement upbringing on "West Twenty-ate Street, New York," to become an errand boy for a company bottling home-made medicines, Granny Gridley Remedies. To his wealthy playmate, Arthur Benton, Jimmy's various adventures appear as "a regular Arabian Nights," and his own life as "but a hollow mockery."[2] Early in the book Arthur is confined by his rich aunt while Jimmy roams the streets free of parental or any other

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[1] *Artie and Pink Marsh* (1896; rpt. Chicago, 1963), p. 130.

[2] Roy L. McCardell, *Jimmy Jones* (Boston, 1907), p. 124.

authoritarian pressure. But eventually Arthur is able to break away from his dull, polite surroundings and become a newspaper boy. The story is an interesting urban variation on *Huckleberry Finn*: instead of the Mississippi River, the streets of New York offer the young heroes an alternative to conventional adult life. The country, in fact, represents a threat to Jimmy, for on an excursion there he becomes totally disgusted with the hard work and early bedtime of farm life. This sojourn quickly enhances his appreciation for the city: "At nite I dreamed of de big city an' de very roar frum de streets seemed to say, 'Come back, Jimmy Jones!'" (p. 104).

McCardell does not portray the repulsiveness of the regular adult world Jimmy and Arthur are trying to escape, but he does present an engaging picture of charming street urchins who deal with the world as if it were a fascinating playground. The author's intentions are not nearly as serious as Twain's; like the other writers discussed so far, he tells a light-hearted story, amusing for the quaintness of Jimmy Jones's speech and his colorful adventures. The shallowness of McCardell's motives are clear by book's end, for rather than glorifying Jimmy's vagabond life or using it as a criticism of American society, he concludes with Arthur going to West Point and Jimmy hoping to study hard and get appointed to the Naval Academy. The boys' life in the streets turns out to be only a passing diversion before they become serious and successful in the adult world. What is most important in the context of this study, is that the slum is portrayed as a lively playland in which a boy without a home cannot only survive, but can enjoy life to its fullest, moving from one adventure to the next, without a worry about providing for himself. This frivolous and unrealistic view contrasts sharply with the concern in the second half of the nineteenth century for the plight

of unattached street urchins. Horatio Alger, for example, despite his fame for creating self-sufficient youngsters who triumph over the difficulties of city life on their own, also established a number of boarding houses where newspaper boys, exclusively, could come for inexpensive beds and meals.

Other children of the slums in strictly comic interpretations include Edward Townsend's Chimmie Fadden and James Otis Kaler's newspaper peddlers in *The Boys' Revolt* (1894). The first character never appeared in a novel but was extremely popular in both short stories and stage adaptations. Chimmie is a wise-cracking slum lad who tells his own success story in a sparkling city-slang similar to that of Ade's Artie. Phrases like "Holy gee, it's rank!" and "Wot t'ell"[1] add color to Townsend's light view of slum life.

Though Kaler's novel uses quaint, scruffy street boys for comic effect, it also seems to have some serious meanings. Told from the viewpoint of the boys, the story deals with their plight as bootblacks. One of them, Baldy Higgs, hits on the idea of forming a "Bootblacks' Labor Union" and calling a strike (against whom he never makes clear) for a ten-cent raise in the price of a shine. Organizing the group, collecting the dues, and formulating rules provide many pages of light-hearted fun similar to the glimpses into poor people's lives in *Jimmy Jones* or *Pink Marsh*. As usual, the characters at first seem meant only to entertain; the boys are happy-go-lucky waifs in a never-ending game in the streets. Soon, however, certain details indicate that the author has a real and unpleasant point. The union, it turns out, is corrupt through and

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[1]Edward W. Townsend, *"Chimmie Fadden" Major Max and Other Stories* (New York, 1895), p. 13.

through. Baldy never has any intentions of leading or supporting his members; he is only interested in collecting dues and then living in luxury. But Baldy's dishonesty is so overt that he quickly loses control and finally resorts to hiring thugs to keep members in line. The uglier his tactics become and the more he oppresses the honest bootblacks, the clearer it is that Kaler is writing a bitter anti-labor tract, not a romantic story of street arabs.

Finally, as Baldy's methods grow more vicious, including fatal beatings, the betrayed bootblacks gather evidence against their leader and eventually depose him. The novel is a strange mixture of romantic, humorous characterization and strong anti-labor propaganda. The seriousness of Kaler's intentions places the work in the category of purposeful reactions to slum problems to be dealt with in Chapter Three, but masking his point in an adventuresome tale of slum boys softens the book's real message. The boys' slang and their day-to-day exploits in shining shoes and dealing with the union activities are distorted little vignettes of slum life whose charm outweighs the moralistic effect Kaler hopes to achieve by making Baldy Higgs so obviously evil. The entertaining characters and incidents of the story and the heavy economic message combine to give the work an unreal quality of faintly amusing allegory, far removed from the realities it pretends to depict.

Comic treatments of slum characters most often employ scruffy children of the street, bootblacks, office boys, and bartenders to rouse readers to laughter. But other stereotypes are called upon too, beggars and tramps, for example, in I. K. Friedman's *The Autobiography of a Beggar* (1903). A Chicago author of many slum stories and novels, Friedman here delivers a lengthy narration by a beggar named Mollbuzzer,

"a name what thieves calls a feller what picks wimens pockets."[1] As with many of the lighter novels mentioned, much of the interest here is in the catchy slang of the narrator as he relates his exploits. But as an illustration of life in the slum, Mollbuzzer and his tramp associates are no different from Artie, the flashy office boy, or Potash and Perlmutter, the scheming businessmen. None of them comes close to giving an honest image of actual people.

On the other hand, of course, the novels cannot be blamed for this omission, given their obviously comic intentions. At least they indicate clearly the middle-class attitude toward the city slum. Considered along with the popularity of slum scenes and stories in comic strips of the day, in stage productions, and in magazine fiction, they add up to a definite urban variation of American humor that had proven successful in the local color and rural schools of fiction. After the Civil War, writers like Joel Chandler Harris, Opie Read, and Edward N. Westcott produced popular works that exploited amusing regional characters, their imagined speech and styles of living. The urban humorists often simply substituted slum folk and prevalent conceptions about them, used the same emphasis on language and unusual incident, and thus arrived at their own distorted but entertaining pictures of Americans in their native settings. That a quick-witted city slicker or colorful newsboy could be as amusing as the traditional Yankee horse trader means that the city was developing its own folklore: it was fair game for broad humor based on popular stereotypes. And in most of the novels examined, the comedy originated in misconception and maintained the misconception by encouraging a shallow, flippant attitude toward city life, the slum in particular. So the

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[1] I. K. Friedman, *The Autobiography of a Begger* (Boston, 1903), p. 134.

humorous treatment of slum residents and their lives is another bit of evidence that though the slum was recognized as a reality during these years, it seldom elicited serious and concerned responses from authors or their readers.

Besides those who wrote comedies, other novelists touched only the edges of slum problems, limiting themselves to romantic clichés. Exposés of city life, popular since the Civil War, were attempted by many writers of fiction during these years. Naturally, these works appeared to be more accurate than the humorous novels, for their whole intent was to give what purported to be a glimpse at the real life of urban, underworld characters. But most of these authors were more interested in sensational fiction than reform-minded revelations of truth.

Perhaps Rupert Hughes's *The Real New York* (1904) is the best general example of this type of work. A visitor to the city is guided around town, from the Waldorf to Chinatown and the Bowery. In twenty detailed chapters, the tourist gets a complete view of New York's unusual sights. In "Let's Go A-Slumming,"[1] Hughes takes him and the reader through some unsavory sections: "the old haunts of vice...The Ghetto...the sweat shop...The Lung Block." As in the comedies, this lurid, superficial reaction to urban problems is used to entertain rather than inform. The appearance of reality in works like this is necessary to arouse interest, but the emphasis on attractions like Coney Island, Bowery theaters, and the Tenderloin after dark indicates that the reality dealt with is limited to the city's flamboyant curiosities. If the slums present an

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[1]Rupert Hughes, *The Real New York* (New York, 1904), pp. 315-346.

exotic façade they will be looked into, but the routine, day-to-day lives of slum residents do not present much that fascinates the tourist merely passing through.

Other exposé-like fiction goes further to reproduce real city conditions, but still ends up more as entertaining fabrication than in-depth portrayal. Two novels by Alfred Henry Lewis, a writer known mainly for his cowboy stories, give detailed but moralistic and romanticized pictures of unscrupulous city types. In the mid-nineties Lewis worked as Washington Bureau Chief for William Randolph Hearst, and thus came in first-hand contact with big-city corruption. In *The Boss* (1903) he forsakes the role of reporter, however, and lets his fictional Tammany Hall man tell his own story. Most of his tale is not directly relevant to the city slums, except insofar as graft is seen in the control of tenements, brothels, gambling dens, and in the purchase of votes from the poor. As a political novel the book is a success, the Boss's outright confessions illustrating accurately the city politics of the day. But except for the peripheral interest in the "little people" at the outside edges of the political machine, it is not a work on the ordinary, more common ways of life in the city. Rather, by singling out the political boss and his rise from poverty, it concentrates, like *The Real New York*, on dramatically charged settings and incidents that do not represent a very wide spectrum of city lifestyles.

The same can be said for Lewis' *Confessions of a Detective* (1906). Again, the hero narrates the inside story of his corrupt life, beginning with his paying $300 to become a patrolman. Police graft is detailed with great care; and as with *The Boss*, most of the revelations are convincing, despite the melodramatic first-person narration. In both books Lewis seemingly utilized much material gathered as a newspaper man, but

relied on techniques acquired while writing his westerns. In any case, these two novels are interesting variations on sensational exposés that appear to present the actual texture of underworld life, but only reflect a rather limited segment of it, thus giving a partial and exaggerated picture of the urban situation.

Another author whose stories purport to reveal the underside of city society was Josiah Flynt Willard. Using experiences as a policeman for the Pennsylvania Railroad, Willard details the exploits of Chicago hoodlums in *The Powers that Prey* (1900) and tells the life-story of a successful criminal in *The Rise of Ruderick Clowd* (1903). Much of the description of the hero's upbringing in the second novel reflects the slum environment honestly. In a setting other than the slums, Ruderick and his friends of the street

> might have developed into the natural leaders in honest industry and struggle of the great world of which theirs was but a small part. They were compelled to take advantage of the opportunities as diligently as do the successful and celebrated in respectable endeavor.[1]

Throughout the novel Willard emphasizes that in becoming a thief the hero is merely acting according to the dictates of his surroundings, achieving all he possibly can within the context of the slum. Some of the chapter titles help create this skeptical, ironic interpretation of Ruderick's life: his years in reform school are discussed in "Where He Went to School," and his rise to underworld fame as a pickpocket in "How He Became a Businessman."

Willard repeatedly depicts crime as a thriving business in Ruderick's neighborhood. But the more success the youngster has in his chosen profession, the less believable the story. He soon joins a Chicago mob run

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[1]Josiah Flynt Willard, *The Rise of Ruderick Clowd* (New York, 1903), p. 104.

by "Susan the Gun," with whom he promptly falls in love. Even more contrived is Ruderick's later arrest for stealing silk from a man who turns out to be the thief's own father. The book's conclusion especially lacks believability as Ruderick finally falls in love with an honest girl who knows nothing of his criminal life, suddenly develops a conscience about his misdeeds, and retires with his new love to live quietly and repent of his dishonest ways. In short, despite engrossing sections about the relationship between Ruderick's yough in the slums and his adult life, the book eventually ends up a rather ordinary criminal/adventure story. As the hero's life rises above that of his ghetto peers, the story turns to emphasize the unusual and romantic, leaving behind the influence of the original slum setting. And having given his readers an enticing glimpse of the forbidden life of a criminal, Willard concludes with his hero's reform, an unconvincing ploy, but one at least consistent in its unreality with the preceding idealization of crime.

Another attempt to convince the reader he is being let in on a genuine and little-known secret of slum life is I. K. Friedman's *The Lucky Number* (1896), a collection of stories about the patrons of a disreputable saloon. For a writer who created some reasonably realistic works on the slum (to be treated later in this chapter), this book is somewhat embarrassing. Most of it is so sentimental as to be less convincing than even the humorously distorted exploits of Mollbuzzer in *Autobiography of a Beggar*. Two of the episodes deal with a tramp songwriter of the slums named Charcoal,

> the abstract and brief chronicle of the vice of the slums. Hated by thieves and thugs for the cowardice that made him a lackey for the lowest vagabonds, he

> represented something below zero on the social thermometer of the district.[1]

A similarly pathetic frequenter of The Lucky Number is Kate, a girl "untainted and unstained" though she has lived all her life "in an atmosphere of crime and sin" (p. 130).

To emphasize the curiosity of this rogues' gallery, Friedman often footnotes slang that may be unfamiliar. "'What slum fer a crib-cracker!'" is translated as "What booty for a safe or lock breaker" (p. 159); and "'He's knowin', dat "smooth"; he's wise as "a jocker"'" (p. 149) means he is a clever young thief, as wise as an experienced one. But this attention to language does not make the one-dimensional characters credible. As with all of these books that concentrate on the sensational, the reader can seldom doubt he is receiving anything but fantastic, outlandish interpretations of actual slum conditions. Organized crime, political corruption, and police graft all made a tangible difference in the lives of slum dwellers, but these were not the most visible signs of their unhappy plight. Their daily struggles to find jobs or to keep mean ones that threatened to defeat all their hopes were always of more immediate concern than the neighborhood's politicians or criminals. Food and shelter usually do take precedence over man's ideological interests, and this is even more true when so much energy must be given, as in the slum, to fundamental necessities. But these novels choose, nevertheless, to focus on the more flamboyant issues of slum life. Rather than delve into the drama of daily survival that involved millions of ordinary slum dwellers, they approach the slum as a seething bed of corruption and evil. For them it is the high drama of the dashing,

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[1] I. K. Friedman, *The Lucky Number* (Chicago, 1896), p. 38.

adventuresome law-breaker or the scheming political boss that most makes the slum a worthwhile subject for fiction.

Comedies and exposés were not, however, the only fiction in which the city slum was dealt with in less than completely honest terms. Despite the consistent popularity of writers like George Ade and Montague Glass, the most enduringly successful type of fiction with book buyers during these years was the simple escapist romance. Popular tales during these twenty years ranged from the religious extravaganza of Henryk Sienkiewicz' *Quo Vadis?* (1896) to the dainty happiness of Kate Douglas Wiggin's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903) and Gene Stratton-Porter's *Freckles* (1904). Francis Marion Crawford was another who mined this lode determinedly, giving the public what it wanted for forty years in novels like *A Cigarette-Maker's Romance* (1890) and *Love in Idleness* (1894). But these writers were not the only romancers who did well financially. In fact, the list seems endless: Archibald C. Gunther (*Mr. Barnes of New York*--1887), Marie Corelli (*Thelma*--1887), Mary Johnston (*To Have and To Hold*--1900), and Robert W. Chambers (*The Fighting Chance*--1906) are only a few of the many writers who offered a constant stream of escapist fare.

Given a public apparently hungry for romantic adventure, it was inevitable that some writers use the slum, its people and their lives as material for conventional romantic novels. Today, after years of ghetto rioting and urban deterioration, the slum as a subject for escapist fiction seems incongruous; but around 1900 it had not yet developed all its unmistakably evil connotations in the popular imagination, despite its certain physical entrenchment. Authors of slum romances found that tenement life provided a fine intense atmosphere and ready-made conflict to add renewed life to traditional stories about the struggles of young

people for love and success. Further, they could see clear evidence in the work of realists that princes in their castles and swashbucklers on the high seas were not the only fictional figures that might win an audience. The era's exciting, bewildering atmosphere of change shouted for attention; hence some writers recognized that idealized interpretations of reality might be just as appealing as far-fetched love and adventure tales that consciously ignored reality.

I. K. Friedman was one of the most practiced of the romantic, slum storytellers. His most typical purely romantic slum novel, *Poor People* (1900), was only one of three Friedman works to appear on the *Bookman* best-seller lists between 1897 and 1902. Episodic in the manner of *The Lucky Number*, this novel portrays a number of neighbors in a slum tenement: Thomas Wilson is a would-be opera composer and the narrator of much of the book; Adolph Vogel is a young watchmaker and aspiring playwright who has inherited a drinking problem; and Ida Wilson is the daughter of Thomas and in love with Vogel. In addition, the subplots are cluttered with a panoply of minor characters who seem shallow imitations of Norris' peripheral figures in *McTeague* (1899): Jan Zwiefka, a Polish shoemaker and part-time faith healer; Ann Nielson, a Swedish garment-worker who has a "fit for moving" which is "naught but a restless fever induced by the loneliness and monotony of her life";[1] a Dutch fortune-teller, Madame Van Meer, who keeps a parrot and three black cats; and Vogel's father, a genius and woodworker destroyed by too much drink. The characterizations alone offer a bizarre picture of tenement life, but the loose plot goes even further into unreality. The main action is the love interest between Ida Wilson and Adolph Vogel, an impossible

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[1]Friedman, *Poor People*, p. 41.

relationship because of his inherited alcoholism. Also heart-rending is the plight of Mr. and Mrs. Wilson when they go to live with another daughter, who has married well and is proceeding up the social ladder. The old couple's son-in-law scorns them and they never feel quite at home in his luxurious surroundings. So, before long, the Wilsons return to their tenement home and their less-successful daughter, Ida: riches and comfort have not been able to substitute for real love.

Predictably, all turns out for the best. Ida's suffering cannot go unrewarded, and Adolph eventually returns from a "cure" not only free from the yearning for drink, but also with a successful play he has written and gotten produced. Even this bare summary of the novel's main events and an enumeration of its range of characters indicate Friedman's superficial use of the slum setting. He is less interested in accurately detailing the slum conditions than in simply creating entertaining, unusual stories. The stereotyped characters, predictable action, and a conventional ending including three marriages, all seem inappropriate for a subject as potentially grim as slum life. But the sheer consistency of Friedman's point of view goes far in eliminating this conflict between his attitude and the real nature of his subject. The way things stand in his slum world can never be doubted: no matter how serious the problem, perseverance and a little luck will enable anyone to triumph over almost any difficulty. This version of reality is obviously unrelated to its supposed source, but because it is so pleasantly, coherently presented and its people so likable, it becomes more a charming, modern-day fairy tale than offensive, romantic drivel.

Other novels present even more fantastic, romantic pictures of slum life. *New York* (1898), by Edgar Fawcett, a prolific writer of satiric society novels, adds romance, intrigue, and crime to the routine plot of

a young man's rise from the slums. George Oliver goes from bank clerk to prisoner in Sing Sing (for embezzlement of bank funds) to rehabilitation and a lengthy, involved romance with a cousin. Even though Fawcett touches on racial problems by introducing an adopted Negro girl as George's sister, the main interest is the hero's romance and his attempts to hide his criminal past from his cousin. And the slum material Fawcett does use seems inserted solely for didactic digression. George's sister plays no real part in the story, but seems only to convey the author's feelings on Negroes:

> Their political liberty cost them oceans of tears, and now they must confront a new, inexorable slavery--that of caste! Their young women grow up in the slums of the side streets--passionate, hot-blooded creatures, full of powers for good, and yet from their birth breathing evil as they breathe the tainted air of their hovels.[1]

Although Fawcett does have some interest in the slum and its problems, his concern is relegated to a sub-plot in *New York*. But such a novel is less deceptive than Friedman's *Poor People*, for it does not even pretend to be about slum residents: as soon as George leaves his sister and his poor, criminal environment behind, the focus shifts almost completely to the upper classes of city life in which George is trying to make his way.

James Oppenheim's *Doctor Rast* (1909) gives a much more satisfying appearance of being a work about people in the slums. A teacher, poet, and magazine editor, Oppenheim's greatest literary successes were in verse written during and after World War I. *Doctor Rast*, an episodic novel like *Poor People*, tells of a devoted man of medicine who gives up a good practice in Connecticut to treat charity patients in the tenements. Some of Morris Rast's routine is convincing: delivering babies, treating

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[1]Edgar Fawcett, *New York* (New York, 1898), p. 26.

sick children, and curing a young lady with pneumonia, for example. But in the melodramatic manner of most mass-media doctors from Kildare to Welby, he often gets involved in considerably more than simple physical problems. Rast saves a young wife who has attempted suicide and persuades her to believe in life and God; he treats another girl, a social revolutionary who has damaged her eyes by reading too much, and convinces her she should be less militant; he talks to young second-generation Jews and helps them see they should be more respectful to their parents. The high tension and human interest are even more overt when Rast is talking himself out of depressions arising from the hopeless magnitude of tenement problems. His bounce back from disillusionment is always more fervid than the original disenchantment. He renews himself once by looking at his work as a divine mission:

> "Our modern men of God perhaps are the settlement workers, the magazine writers, the doctors. And you see it's so effective--we don't preach to them. We go and do something; take God to them--give them Revelation--by giving them a big let-up--and a let-up means an up-lift--and backing it with love, with service, with--with"--he smiled--"I'm afraid I'm getting churchy--yes, with renunciation."[1]

All this flamboyant drama is an overreliance on the atypical and the emotional to communicate a picture of slum life. Thus, as with *Poor People*, this version of the slum world is not very believable, despite its exciting story. In essence, Oppenheim simply accentuates the most intense episodes of a slum doctor's routine, minimizes the doubts he could have from time to time, and glorifies his firm resolution to persevere with his humane work. Such a treatment is the heart of all the romantic attitudes these fanciful novels reveal. They all look at the slum with the same passion as Dr. Rast in a quizzical mood:

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[1]James Oppenheim, *Doctor Rast* (New York, 1909), p. 28.

> Strange human city--full of souls in gigantic tragic struggle--and yet all so busy, bustling, commonplace, eating and drinking and reading the newspaper! (p. 164)

The glamorous description of the city streets in Ernest Poole's *The Voice of the Street* (1906) has been mentioned earlier. The romantic characterization of its singer/gambler hero, Lucky Jim, is consistent with this treatment of the setting. Poole had a good background for dealing with slum topics, having written labor-reform articles for *McClure's* around 1900. But this first novel reflects neither the author's concern for child-labor laws nor his connections with a New York settlement house. It centers instead on Jim's struggles for success as a singer. The youngster receives voice training from the colorful Fritz Bernstene, a ghetto violinist from Germany, and his lovely daughter Gretchen. The main obstacles they face in preparing Jim for a serious career in music are the boy's gambling and his mistreatment of his voice by singing jazz in cafes.

The earlier part of the story contains the kind of sound, realistic description of Jim's fight to work his way out of the slum that characterizes Poole's more successful *The Harbor* (1915), a tale of the New York docks. But as the plot develops, Poole's presentation of the boy's troubles becomes conventional and predictable. Sections on how he strains his voice singing popular music alternate with others in which Bernestene and Gretchen try to convince him to save his talents. Toward the end Jim's voice gets continually worse, his gambling losses mount, and Gretchen turns secretly to crime to support him and pay for his music lessons. Finally she is caught and goes to jail, causing a sincere reformation in Jim, who by now has fallen in love with the girl. But after a year or so of hard work, he achieves his hard-won success and appears in a concert at the Metropolitan, as the paroled Gretchen looks on with pride.

The picture of slum life in *The Voice of the Street*, as in all the novels discussed so far, is determined by extraordinary events and traditional, heroic struggles in the face of adversity. Despite the believable threat the city streets pose to Jim, and despite the entertaining story of his triumph, the novel is basically an unreliable account of the slum reality. In the final lines of the book Poole tries to capture the ecstacy of Jim's success at the Met:

> Be glad--for the Age of the Street will forever pass to make way for the Age of Song. Be glad--for life--real life--is not murder of the weak by the mighty. Be glad--for life is creation...life is the birth and the growth of beauty and joy for all! Be glad--for life is love![1]

Not all of the novel is so melodramatic, but the point of view, on the whole, *is* consistent with this enthusiasm. Jim's battles with the slum are seen as a noble expression of man's superiority--with the help of much work and a little luck--to any challenge his environment can present. Jim sings his way out of the slums and into the Met, and in retrospect none of his difficulties seems to have been very substantial.

The most interesting romantic novel of slum life is Alice Hegan Rice's *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* (1901), a story of humble, extremely optimistic tenement folk. An outstanding popular success, this work appeared on the *Bookman* best-seller lists for twenty-nine consecutive months between 1901 and 1904, was dramatized and later made into a movie starring Zasu Pitts and W. C. Fields, and was translated into several foreign languages. The main character is a cheerful widow striving to support her family in their run-down, slum neighborhood. What distinguishes the story is Mrs. Wiggs's fantastically happy outlook:

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[1]Poole, *The Voice of the Street*, p. 285.

> "Lots of folks is walkin' 'round jes' as dead as they'll ever be. I believe in gittin' as much good outen life as you kin--not that I ever set out to look fer happiness; seems like the folks that does that never finds it. I jes' do the best I kin where the good Lord put me at, an' it looks like I got a happy feelin' in me 'most all the time."[1]

Even when her eldest son dies, depriving the family of a much-needed breadwinner, Mrs. Wiggs continues in her cheerfulness and is soon rewarded for it: a charity worker writes a newspaper article describing the situation of the Wiggs family, and a flood-tide of money and provisions comes in, enough to last them a year. So Mrs. Wiggs's quaint, homey outlook carries her through to better times, as she is always certain it will.

This work takes its place during these years with best-sellers like *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (1903) and *Freckles* (1904), other works based almost exclusively on characters with unusually sunny outlooks. But unlike these other works set in the country, *Mrs. Wiggs* takes place in a slum. In fact, that is the only real difference between it and the many frilly books by Kate D. Wiggin and Gene Stratton-Porter. From its title to Mrs. Wiggs's speech patterns, this too is a thoroughly rural work. At one point in the story, Mrs. Wiggs tells her son about their former home in the country. Since the boy is a factory worker and cannot get the whirr of machinery out of his head, his mother's tales of the old days in the peaceful country have a calming effect on him: "his dim recollection of it all formed his one conception of heaven" (p. 29). And in her bright attitude toward life, Mrs. Wiggs is little different from any number of rural figures in contemporary popular literature: Irving Bacheller's Eben Holden and Silas Strong, F. Hopkinson Smith's Colonel Carter, Joseph Lincoln's Cap'n Eri, and Edward Westcott's David Harum are

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[1]Alice Caldwell Hegan Rice, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* (New York, 1901), p. 125.

all winsome country characters. But in placing such a figure in a city setting, Mrs. Rice offered an original approach to slum life that found solid acceptance with the American people. Mrs. Wiggs's point of view is certainly congenial, to say the least, with the nation's predominant ideas around 1900 concerning the poor, work, and success. Her ready smile and undaunted hanging-on to hope are similar to the spirit of the more pragmatic philosophers, the motivation of the muckrakers, and the good intentions of the Social Gospel clergymen. Further, Mrs. Wiggs's stalwart faith in the eventual happy outcome of any disaster must have been a thoroughly admirable trait to a successful middle-class, upset by hordes of unemployed immigrants and native Americans who appeared as lazy, shiftless, and threatening to the continued progress of the country. To those out of work or on strike, Mrs. Wiggs might say, with the support of her throngs of avid readers,

> "It is easy enough to be pleasant
> When life flows along like a song,
> But the man worth while is the one who will smile
> When everything goes dead wrong." (p. 54)

This point of view is appropriate enough for a healthy, rural environment, but transferred to the city slum it seems wholly inadequate. Yet this is the attitude displayed in these novels, even if the characters are not as obviously country-flavored as Mrs. Wiggs. All the main characters examined so far believe like Mrs. Wiggs that no matter how dismal their present condition they have only to grit their teeth and await better times. Such an attitude maintains Friedman's Ida Wilson when she doubts Adolph Vogel's fitness for marriage because of his drinking; it urges Oppenheim's Dr. Rast to continue his work in spite of his patients' slovenly, unthankful ways; and it encourages Poole's Lucky Jim and his girlfriend to persevere in saving his voice for its great destiny. All

these novels' characters exude a supreme, rosy confidence that declares they will be equal to whatever evil the slum may present.

As previously noted, Stephen Crane uses *Maggie* to mock such an application of a middle-class success ethic to the lives of slum dwellers. But other novels during these years use the same type of character Crane employs and still take this standard seriously. Whereas Crane treats Maggie Johnson ironically as a "flower-in-the-mud," most other authors delineate their young characters very literally as delicate beings with an abundance of sterling traits that actually do enable them to blossom in the tenements. These hardy boys and girls populate a strain of romantic slum life novels all their own.

One of the most charming of these urchins appears in two books by Ida T. Thurston, *The Bishop's Shadow* (1899) and *The Big Brother of Sabin Street* (1909). In the first, Theodore "Tode" Bryan is transformed through the example of a concerned bishop from a dirty street-ruffian into an angelic, Christian lad. Although little is seen of Tode in his unreformed state, he is clearly ready for the influence of a man like the bishop, for his heart is "like a garden spot in which the rich, strong soil lay ready to receive any seed that might fall upon it."[1] The better Tode becomes acquainted with the bishop the more he idolizes him and strives to pattern his life after this hero. As he goes about his different jobs--newspaper boy, lunch-stand operator, brass polisher--Tode continually tries to lend a hand to fellow slum residents and spread a happy outlook throughout the tenements, where "a cheerful word or smile has a wonderful power" (pp. 129-130). Although some of his old friends are resentful of Tode's new, pious nature, the book's conclusion shows him continuing

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[1] I. T. Thurston, *The Bishop's Shadow* (New York, 1899), p. 85.

in his reformed ways and planning to open a reading-room for newsboys:

> "I've been mean as dirt all my life. You don't know what mean things I've done, an' I ain't goin' to tell ye...I've got to make a man of myself...the kind that helps other folks up...I mean I'm goin' to try to amount to something myself, an' do what I can to help other poor fellers up." (p. 117)

Tode Bryan continues to bloom, even after he has left the "mud" far behind. *The Big Brother of Sabin Street*, a sequal to *The Bishop's Shadow*, begins with Tode graduating from Harvard, where he has been known as "The White Flame," since he would never "stand for anything that isn't square and white."[1] Through a complicated series of events, the young man's plans to become a minister are thwarted, so he returns to his slum home in Boston to start a boys' club for homeless waifs. There he trains the boys in useful skills such as carpentry, and more important, organizes them in fighting the neighborhood saloons. This temperance effort in the second half of the book culminates in arson perpetrated by whiskey interests, skeptical and conservative parents, corrupt politicians, and various street-rowdies not belonging to Tode's club. Against this devilish alliance the boys and their leader have a stiff, uphill battle. But even with the settlement house somewhat damaged by the fire and Tode seriously wounded by a brick-throwing antagonist, eventual triumph is inevitable. Tode is too dedicated, his little followers too wonderfully regenerated for any but the happiest conclusion. He does recover, and his crusade gains strength because of the foul means of his opponents. The book ends with Tode planning further help for other innocent little flowers, as well as something for their elders, a separate house for men to encourage them to stay out of the bars.

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[1] *The Big Brother of Sabin Street* (New York, 1909), p. 10.

Throughout both these books the primary emphasis is on the practicality of slum youngsters reforming themselves and their surroundings through Christian social action and clean living. Unlike the debilitating problems in *Maggie*, the threats of alcoholism and poverty in Thurston's two books can be effectively met and finally defeated. The tactic necessary for victory is simply a cultivation of men's basically good, God-given nature. Anyone can thrive in a tenement, Thurston seems to say, with only a little special care and encouragement. Tode himself puts it like this:

> "Every soul He sends into the world is made in His image--even the souls of these poor little waifs around us here. Then, as the years pass, sin covers that image deeper and deeper, till...it seems as if the Image never could have been there at all, but it is--it *is* there--and if we can only brush away the accumulations of the years we shall bring it to the light; and that means a boy saved! And the image is in *every soul*--remember that." (p. 96)

The moral and psychological effects of slum life can be washed off like its tangible dirt and grime. While drunkenness, suicide, and hopelessness are ugly possibilities, renewal is just as possible, given an upright adult model and a fair amount of perseverance.

Many authors offer female versions of this type of triumphant slum youngster, among them Ruth McEnery Stuart, a writer of magazine fiction on Creoles, Negroes, and poor whites of her native Louisiana. In *The Story of Babette* (1894) a Creole girl is kidnapped by a band of Sicilian gypsies, with whom she grows up in poor but exotic surroundings. More relevant to this study is *Carlotta's Intended* (1891), a tale about the Italian Di Carlo family, their fruit stand in New Orleans, and an Irish cobbler named Pat Rooney. After having watched the daughter Carlotta grow up, Rooney finds himself in love with her. The heart of the story is their thwarted love: the Irishman finally commits suicide

when a young Italian boy falls in love with Carlotta and she discourages him because of Rooney's attachment to her. Carlotta makes her way unblemished through this conflict and through a marriage arranged by the family to an ugly, old widower, a suitor with Mafia support to bolster his cause. Through all these sinister complications Carlotta emerges a pure and unaffected heroine.

> Behold the sweet daughter, Carlotta Di Carlo! The discerning eye beheld in her promise of romance, possibilities of tragedy, and he who looked upon her once paused to look again.[1]

Less convincing than even the Thurston books, Stuart's stories do not deal with real slum situations, but concentrate on the exaggerated difficulties over which their heroines must triumph.

A pure, young heroine placed in more realistic surroundings but still maintaining her spotless integrity is Cecilia Sweeney in Isabella R. Hess's *Saint Cecilia of the Court* (1905). This flower has an even more admirable adult cultivator than Tode Bryan's bishop. Jim Belway is a kindly young shoemaker in the Court who goes out of his way to help those in need, even if it means depriving himself. Like the grown-up Tode, he is another example of a clean youngster continuing to flower and escape slum evils far beyond his early years. Jim and Cecilia become acquainted when she moves into the Court. He soon displays his altruism by pawning his dead wife's ring to buy a decent breakfast for Cecilia's brother Puddin', who has been injured in a fall. The remainder of the novel is simply an elaboration of these people's good natures, one sacrifice following another in a veritable flood of renunciation and charity. When Mrs. Sweeney dies, for example, Jim pays for her funeral and takes Cecilia into his shop. In another incident, when the heroine

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[1]Ruth McEnery Stuart, *Carlotta's Intended* (New York, 1891), p. 4.

visits her brother in the hospital, she meets a depressed alcoholic and gives him a little pep talk that improves his spirits. After this man is cured he credits Cecilia's encouragement, throws a party for her and the other main characters, and announces that he plans to send Cecilia and Puddin' to school at his expense.

These slum residents flower so fervently that this book rivals *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* in sheer happiness. The purity and strength of these characters in the face of great tribulations offer readers model behavior that is both practical and pleasant. Clean living, hard work, and steady hope will pull anyone through the worst conditions, with love and Christian concern to spare. A fine illustration of this belief appears toward the end of the novel when Jim is sick with pneumonia. After Cecilia's constant care brings about recovery, Jim's doctor says, "'Back of that attack of pneumonia stretched a clean life, and that gave science the upper hand of death.'" And another character adds, "'And a clean life in that God-for-saken Court is a finer achievement than anywhere else!'"[1]

Edward W. Townsend, in addition to the comical slum child Chimmie Fadden, also created a distinctive "flower-in-the-mud" youngster. Carminella Cesarotti, the heroine of *A Daughter of the Tenements* (1895), is another child with "mind and body untainted by the slums."[2] Like Carlotta Di Carlo, Carminella is a charming little waif with an exotic national background who remains unsullied throughout a complex series of intrigues. Her potential is recognized early by her mother, Teresa, and

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[1]Isabella R. Hess, *Saint Cecilia of the Court* (New York, 1905), pp. 187-188.

[2]Townsend, *A Daughter of the Tenements*, p. 51.

she is sent to mission schools. There she studies with Miss Eleanor Hazelhurst, a society lady who has given up her life of luxury to work with the poor and who is best able to bring out Carminella's innate intelligence. The true test of her good nature, however, comes when she is fourteen and must go to work as a stage dancer to help pay for her special education. But this is only one of many challenges. Numerous villains threaten the happiness of Carminella and her mother in the adventuresome plots and sub-plots: Mark Waters, an evil lawyer who pockets money sent to him for Mrs. Cesarotti from her estranged husband and who is bent on seducing Carminella after seeing her dance at the Tivoli; Chung, a mysterious, opium-smoking Chinaman, who steals one of Mr. Cesarotti's letters to Waters; and Riccodonna, a fascinating minor antagonist who is an unscrupulous seller of second-rate fruit. But with the help of Miss Hazelhurst and a clean-cut young Irishman Tom Lyon, who saves her from abduction by Waters, Carminella manages to emerge unscathed. In fact, Carminella seems only remotely present during much of the dramatic action taking place around her, including theft, blackmail, and planned kidnapping. Unlike Crane's Maggie Johnson, who is sucked inexorably into the destructive events of her world, Carminella seems to move in a separate sphere from that of her mother, the fruit peddlers, schemers, and opium dealers. And in the end it is another figure set apart from the emotion and melodrama, Tom Lyon, who marries Carminella. Her role as heroine is best expressed by an illustration on the book's cover. A golden sun with many long, bright rays emanating from it is suspended over a view of tightly packed tenements; in the middle is an inset of Carminella, looking like a quaint gypsy queen set apart from the corruption of her world.

Such is the involvement of most of the heroes in these slum romances. McCardell's Jimmy Jones, Willard's Ruderick Clowd, Townsend's Carminella Cesarotti all play large, dramatic roles in their stories but still seem unaffected by their environment. This detachment is due largely to each character being clearly superior to almost every situation in which he finds himself. The slum is consistently pictured in terms of its color, its variety of unusual lifestyles, and its amusing characters. It is a springboard from which those of high moral and spiritual caliber can move up to success. And the heroes have this necessary high caliber: like modern-day noble savages, their natural strength and beauty assures their survival. Whether they transcend their surroundings with a good-humored chuckle, as does Ade's Pink Marsh; with clever thievery like that of Friedman's tramps; or by capitalizing on their own optimistic and clean styles of living, like Thurston's Tode Bryan; they all do manage to assert themselves, to fulfill their ambitions, and to end up unquestionably better off than when their stories began.

In employing such outstanding characters and placing them in settings that only rarely present real, convincing challenges, these authors are working squarely within the mainstream of popular, romantic fiction. And this tradition was basically Midwestern and rural, as Larzer Ziff points out in discussing popular literature of the nineties in the context of "The Midwestern Imagination."[1] The romantic position "assumed that the morality of a rural upbringing was unshakable," and that

> the arts should consist of beautiful illustrations of these principles triumphing in a world cleared of external impediments so that virtue unaided could meet unaided vice and give it its certain defeat.... Literature should illustrate the shared values of the rural community. (pp. 84-85)

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[1]Larzer Ziff, *The American 1890s* (New York, 1966), pp. 73-92.

And many other characters besides Mrs. Wiggs are guided by simple, earthy standards. Even the distinctly urban among them, Artie, Jimmy Jones, Ruderick Clowd, Abe Potash, and Morris Perlmutter have an abundance of cheerfulness, confidence in the rightness of the world in whatever state they find it, and a ready willingness to set about changing whatever may not be quite right. In short, they face their slum surroundings with the same stalwart determination as the country's early settlers. Not that these authors consciously put rugged pioneer types into the slums, but the depiction of slum-dwellers' beliefs implies a coming to terms with their environment with the same ideology that helped conquer the wilderness. These novels suggest that the fictional hero of the slum can be just as dashing and ideal a figure as any latter-day backwoodsman.

And these works also participate in the popular romantic tradition by creating an over-all aura of light, entertaining escape. Most writers who had either achieved popular success or strived for it conformed to the romantic credo of purity and pleasure. They generally agreed with Francis Marion Crawford, a fluent spokesman for the romantic point of view, that the "perfect novel" should be "clean and sweet" and be basically a love story. It could face reality, "but in such a way as to make it seem more agreeable and interesting than it actually is."[1] Other commentators too among realists and romanticists stated that realism depicted men the way they were, romanticism as they should be. Such a concept of literature is, again, a part of the predominantly rural, Midwestern culture. During a period of economic turmoil and rapid change, the traditional romantic tenets attracted widespread, unquestioned popular support, despite the substantial inroads of intelligent and humane realists like

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[1]Grant C. Knight, *The Critical Period in American Literature* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1951), p. 63.

Howells. Readers did not want to know about the drab, depressing lives of slum residents, living symbols of the disruption the society was experiencing even during prosperous economic periods like the eighties or the first decade of the new century. Rather, they preferred either escape or reassurance that the qualities that got us through past crises--determination, persistence, and good humor--would also carry us through the intense disorder of industrialization and urbanization. The nation's virtues, it was hoped, would be adequate to meet the confusing problems of the new urban society.

More than the extremely popular country novels like *David Harum* (1898) and *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908), and more than the escapist fantasies like *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894) and *Graustark* (1901), these romantic slum novels served to reassert threatened American values by showing people using these values to triumph over the slum, one of the more brutal aspects of the changing scene. Despite their dishonesty in appearing to face slum life while usually just telling another routine romantic story, these novelists do offer a distinct interpretation of what it is like and an identifiable attitude toward it. They use dandies like Ade's Artie and McCardell's Jimmy Jones to say that the slum is a fast world of slick, amusing, sometimes dishonest young schemers. They employ humble, worn strugglers such as those in Friedman's *Poor People* and Oppenheim's *Doctor Rast* to show the valiant, human effort and heart-rending high drama that make up life in the tenements. And they write of characters like Cecilia Sweeney and Carminella Cesarotti to demonstrate that untainted, noble youngsters can achieve happiness in the slums. None of these renditions takes the threat of the slum with much seriousness, and all give reassurance that, one way or another, it can be coped with and mastered.

Other authors were more willing than those who wrote romances of slum life to make some conscientious effort to face America as it was. Under the leadership of Howells these writers had achieved something of a victory for their realist cause by 1900. And though not all the major realists were willing to deal with the more unsightly aspects of the changing American scene, some at least did attempt honest fictional approaches to hitherto ignored facets of our national life like the slum. In addition to their literary gains, their efforts achieved victories with the public: *Maggie* appeared on the *Bookman* best-seller lists in 1896, after *The Red Badge of Courage* caught English readers' imaginations; Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* made a showing in 1907; and both London's *People of the Abyss* (1903) and *The Iron Heel* (1908) were brief best-sellers. Some readers were becoming more willing to accept fiction of some substance, perhaps because as the times grew more complex, the escape offered by frivolous historical romances or frilly society love stories became less viable. As much as people may have wanted to return to Old Vincennes or recapture flowering knighthood, the impossibility of doing either and the futility of even dreaming about it became more powerfully evident as the years passed. As Grant Knight puts it,

> No romantic smokescreen could conceal for long the harsher actualities of life in the western world in the 1890's: the struggle for power among the great nations, the exploitation of inferior races, the wretchedness of the poor, the prodigality of the rich, the inequalities in the administration of justice, the spread of cynicism and pessimism, the weakening of religious faith, the growth of unhappiness before systems of thought and government so varied and so complex as to produce confusion, frustration, and fear.[1]

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[1]Knight, *The Critical Period*, pp. 168-169.

The novels to be considered next did attempt to deal, often with much hesitation and compromise, with a part of this turmoil. Occasionally their authors can be called full-fledged minor realists, but usually only their serious attitude toward their slum material, not their technique, merits critical consideration. They demonstrated a willingness to look honestly at the slum, and they tried to communicate clearly the horrors they found there. Instead of confirming their readers' misconceptions about the slum, the more realistic novelists simply inform them that it was a reality that could not be quickly disposed of or even smoothly fitted into our past national experience by a hardy effort of the will.

Before the seven more realistic slum novels are examined in some detail, a few passages from them and other novels will be presented that contrast with the inaccurate descriptions of tenement settings cited earlier. Some of these are simply general, believable delineations of the slum's appearance; others are specifically the reactions of newly arrived immigrants or native Americans. Even in the realm of pure physical description of the slum, some authors offer much more accurately detailed, grim depictions of ghetto neighborhoods than the storytellers already discussed. In fact, genuinely convincing, brief passages on slum conditions are fairly common and even to be found occasionally in the work of novelists not necessarily known for their realism.

Robert W. Chambers, for example, was a prolific popular writer whose work ranges from society romances to Civil-War adventure stories. Chambers could describe the slum vividly, as evident in *The Outsiders* (1899). The hero passes through a slum on returning to New York City after a twelve-year absence and is dismayed by

> ugliness enthroned, nay, glorified, ornamented, bedizened with sham and poverty,...a Pueblo wilderness of cubes, rank with neglect, rusty, plastered

> brick on brick--vistas of masonry, painted, palisaded, worn-holed with windows, blocks of granular brown stone, vast steel shells papered with yellow brick and stucco, painted iron masses riddled with windows,--everywhere windows, every roof and tower and spire peppered full of windows![1]

This consternation in facing the slum's cold exterior goes on for a number of pages.

Similar believable descriptions were sometimes a part of Brander Matthews' writing on New York. A professor of English at Columbia, Matthews wrote works dealing with all levels of city life. *A Confident To-morrow* (1899), for example, tells of newspaperman Frank Sartain coming to New York to look for work. Matthews carefully pictures Sartain's disillusionment upon encountering a slum's rush and dirtiness:

> The needless ugliness of the surroundings, the sordid grimness of the water-front generally, the shabbiness in particular of the stands that backed up against some of the buildings, all detracted not a little from the impression of dignified strength which New York had made upon him when seen from afar.[2]

Matthews meticulously sets the unpleasant slum scene, as does Chambers, and shows his character's revulsion against it. Instead of talking about it as a wilderness, however, Matthews once describes the slum as an ugly, carnivorous animal:

> The noise of the city rose all about him like the call of some strange beast, hungry and insatiable and insisting upon its human sacrifice night and morning. It was not a shrill cry, nor a petulant; it was a deep, reverberating roar, appalling when its significance was seized. (p. 6)

The most literate and detailed description of the slum's discouraging appearance is found in Henry Fuller's *The Cliff-Dwellers* (1893), a novel

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[1]Robert W. Chambers, *The Outsiders* (New York, 1899), p. 6.

[2]Brander Matthews, *A Confident To-morrow* (New York, 1899), p. 5.

second only to *Sister Carrie* in its convincing picture of the life of a large American city at the end of the century. The introduction sets an unsavory atmosphere. Again the slum is treated as a barren place:

> This country is a treeless country--if we overlook the "forest of chimneys" comprised in a bird's-eye view of any great city, and if we are unable to detect any botanical analogies in the lofty articulated iron funnels whose ramifying cables reach out wherever they can, to fasten wherever they may. It is a shrubless country--if we give no heed to the gnarled carpentry of the awkward frame-works which carry the telegraph, and which are set askew on such dizzy corners as the course of the wires may compel. It is an arrid country--if we overlook the numberless tanks that squat on the high angles of alley walls, or if we fail to see the little pools of tar and gravel that ooze and shimmer in the summer sun on the roofs of old-fashioned buildings of the humbler sort. It is an airless country--if by air we mean the mere combination of oxygen and nitrogen which is commonly indicated by that name. For here the medium of sight, sound, light, and life becomes largely carbonaceous, and the remoter peaks of this mighty yet unprepossessing landscape loom up grandly, but vaguely, through swathing mists of coal smoke.[1]

This is clearly a depiction superior to those cited earlier that stress only the gay excitement of the slum's surface appearance.

When this novel's observant hero ventures into slum neighborhoods, he has some understanding of the real nature of ghetto life. The city's foreign population, for example, seems a "human maelstrom":

> The universal brotherhood of man appeared before him, and it smelt of mortality--no partial, exclusive mortality, but a mortality comprehensive, universal, condensed and averaged up from the grand totality of items. (p. 55)

Such reactions are a far cry from the flighty responses of the usual slumming party of popular romances. Descriptions like these are interesting digressions along the way to Fuller's main objective, a critical look at big-city bankers and real-estate men.

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[1]Henry B. Fuller, *The Cliff-Dwellers* (New York, 1893), pp. 3-4.

Novels dealing more explicitly with slum life often picture it through the eyes of a new arrival. A country bumpkin or a foreigner dreams of the urban world as a land of plenty that will fulfill his every dream of a good life. Unlike previous success-ethic works such as the Horatio Alger novels, these stories use this traditional theme of a search for a better life to present characters' bitter disappointments on sinking quickly to the slums, as well as their fervent expectations beforehand.

One particularly effective portrayal of the new arrival's dashed hopes is in Edward King's *Joseph Zalmonah* (1893), a novel of labor struggles to be discussed in Chapter Three. An early part of the book deals with the arrival of the hero's wife and daughter from Russia. During the long sea-voyage the two spend many hours trying to picture all the glories of the new world, and their fantasies soon get out of hand:

> Into this pleasure ground they would be doubtless ushered up long flights of marble stairs, leading from the sea; and after pleasant partings there with their fellow-voyagers, and joyous meeting with their friends awaiting them, they would go merrily forward in pursuit of fortune, and perhaps of fame.[1]

But the immigrant center in New York is quite contrary to all their lavish preconceptions. The husband Joseph is not on hand to greet the pair, and mother and daughter are nearly smothered in the crush and confusion on the dirty pier:

> The gloomy interior of Castle Garden was crowded with them; and men, women, and children were straggling about, vainly trying to obey the orders shouted at them in half a dozen languages. In one dark corner a dozen long-bearded old men had thrown themselves down in the dirt together, and were gazing up at the whitewashed walls of the time-worn fortress with as melancholy air as if they were prisoners. Black-hued and tawny-skinned women, with quaintly dressed little children clinging to their skirts, sat on their bundles

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[1]Edward King, *Joseph Zalmonah* (1893; rpt. Ridgewood, New Jersey, 1968), pp. 13-14.

> of household gear, and looked around with frightened eyes. The portal to the Land of Promise was so different from the image which they had formed of it! ....this gloomy place into which they were almost driven, as if they were sheep or cattle! this circular tower, which seemed like the anteroom to some penal institution!--how sadly did it differ from their vision! Was it possible that it was the gateway to Liberty? (pp. 13-14)

King deflates the myth of America as the Promised Land by showing this naive hope being utterly destroyed by an unexpectedly brutal reality. Certainly this woman's dreams would have come closer to fulfillment in the previous, less-urbanized century; but by 1893 quick success in the American city was much rarer. Chances of winning easy prosperity for the uninitiated newcomer were rapidly declining. Though the old dream still flourished, the reality had turned into a fierce struggle, if not a nightmare. As early as 1840 outcries were heard against lax immigration regulations, and in 1882 and 1885 laws were passed to control this source of cheap labor flooding the country.[1]

Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1905), another novel to be discussed in Chapter Three, gives further poignant descriptions of immigrants in a strange, perplexing slum. In this version the myth is not concocted on the way to America but, as more commonly happened in real life, originates by rumor in the native land. The immigrant characters in *The Jungle* know of a friend who became wealthy in America, so a group of them bands together for the trip. Upon arrival the hero confidently expects to "marry, and be a rich man in the bargain," for "America was a place of which lovers and young people dreamed."[2] Some of these people's hopes are fulfilled, for they are seeking political and religious freedom as

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[1]Beard, *New Basic History*, pp. 390-391.

[2]Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (1905; rpt. New York, 1960), p. 27.

well as wealth and instant success. But Sinclair leaves little doubt that the majority of their desires are doomed. When their ship docks, the first of many long, gruesome passages sets forth the true nature of the new world. And in Chicago the immigrants' intensely painful awakening continues. Frightened and helpless, they approach the city by train:

> A full hour before the party reached the city they had begun to note the perplexing changes in the atmosphere. It grew darker all the time, and upon the earth the grass seemed to grow less green. Every minute, as the train sped on, the colors of things became dingier; the fields were grown parched and yellow, the landscape hideous and bare. And along with the thickening smoke they began to notice another circumstance, a strange, pungent odor....It was now no longer something far off and faint, that you caught in whiffs; you could literally taste it, as well as smell it--you could take hold of it, almost, and examine it at your leisure. (pp. 29-30)

This entrance into the nightmare world of the stockyards is, of course, only the beginning of these people's troubles. But Sinclair opens the novel powerfully by relating the immigrants' anticipation and contrasting its dismal outcome, a relentless pattern throughout the book. These gritty descriptions of slum life take apart the American myth of easy achievement for all and give a complex picture of the actual slum challenge--a picture consciously idealized and distorted by the more romantic novelists.

Yet another powerful description of immigrants facing a bewildering new home is in Henryk Sienkiewicz' *After Bread* (1897). Polish farmer Lorenz Toporek and his daughter migrate to America after they are ruined by a suit for damage done to a neighbor's property by their cow. Despondent, Toporek is swept off his feet by a German steamship agent's praise of the easy life in America. Next, the author takes forty pages to describe the Toporeks' crossing, a long and miserable voyage that tends to magnify their worst fears instead of encourage them to fantasize

about the plenty of their new life. After a terrible storm at sea, they sail into New York, certain their difficulties are over.

But the worst is just beginning, as Sienkiewicz shows in the next fifty pages. They spend their first night in the city huddled on the pier, waiting for the American guide the agent promised would meet them and help them get settled. After realizing the next day that this man will never appear, the two make their way to the city's immigrant ghetto and are thrown immediately into a confusing, fearful turmoil that nearly overwhelms them:

> This city appeared strange, full of din and noise, whistles, the rattling of wagons, and the cries and shouts of the people. Everybody went so quickly that they looked as if they were either chasing, or trying to escape from, somebody, and besides, what an ant-hill of people, what strange faces--some dark, some bronzed, some olive...the wagons rattled, the trucks groaned, and the noise reminded them of a sawmill.[1]

Unable to find a job or even communicate adequately with prospective employers, Toporek things back fondly to the forests and fields of his birthplace and decides he would prefer that rural poverty to his dismal condition in New York. There he would at least be respected by his neighbors and aided by them in his troubles, but here "he was lost among all, like a stray dog in a strange yard--timid, trembling, bent, and hungry" (p. 61).

In novels about rural folk seeking to improve their lot in the big city, a theme that goes back at least to Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, the same kinds of minute descriptions convey characters' sudden realization that the slum is not at all the city setting they had preconceived. A novelist who specialized in this kind of story was Will Payne, a

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[1]Henryk Sienkiewicz, *After Bread* (New York, 1897), pp. 48-49.

journalist who himself came to Chicago from Nebraska in 1890. Writing about what he knew best in *Jerry the Dreamer* (1896), Payne tells of a reform-minded newspaper man who leaves his village to make his way in Chicago. With his heart giving "a great leap" and "his eager spirits" urging him on, Jerry heads confidently toward the city and "life, money, joy!"[1] But upon arrival his letdown is no less than that of a newly landed immigrant in New York. The boy enters the city by train and it is raining; further along the smoke and the close, ramshackle buildings of the slums become more prominent. Finally he checks into a run-down hotel and surveys the neighborhood.

> He walked south until he got among the pawn-shops, second-hand stores, and dirty saloons. Then he went east, and back to the hotel on another street. He was tired; but he had seen nothing--had no impressions. There had been only interminable rows of buildings--irregular, ugly, without distinction; endless streams of people going and coming; countless wagons and street-cars all singularly featureless and immemorable. (p. 17)

After this dull sameness has truly ground him down, Jerry thinks back, in exactly the same manner as Lorenz Toporek, to the village he has left. He recalls mainly the "quietness, friendliness" of his rural home and cannot adjust to the "indifference" of the Chicago streets, where he felt "at a disadvantage, as though he had spoken a different language" (pp. 26-27). The entire first third of this novel portrays Jerry coping with the jarring impact of the slums, armed only with his rural background.

Likewise in *The Story of Eva* (1901) Payne's main character comes to Chicago from the rural Midwest to search for a new beginning. Entering the city by train, like many other characters, Eva is startled by the panorama unfolding before her.

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[1]Will Payne, *Jerry the Dreamer* (New York, 1896), p. 13.

> Again the train wheeled her by houses so close that she could almost stretch out her hand and touch the walls. Through rear flat windows she had intimate glimpses of living rooms with people in them...Eva saw towering bulks of masonry, vast, numberless, close-packed, lifting into a sullen pall of smoke. Her heart gave a start. It was so big, so formidable, so near at hand.[1]

Again the emphasis is on the slum's crowding and its blatant indifference--it presents the same face to every new arrival.

A far more complex description of the distasteful appearance of the slum in contrast with glorified preconceptions of a city luxurious is in Reginald Kauffman's *The House of Bondage* (1910), a densely realistic novel of a girl's ruinous involvement in prostitution. The heroine, Mary Denbigh, is enticed away from her Pennsylvania village by the account of New York life given her by a procurer masquerading as an ardent lover.

> New York, it appeared, was a city of splendid leisure. Its entire four millions of population spent their days in rest and their nights in amusement...Nobody was ugly and nobody was old. There were no books to study, no errands to run, no dishes to wash...the far-off orchestras were calling her, as if the sound of the city deafened her to all other sounds, as if the lights of New York blinded her to the lights of home.[2]

This is, indeed, a classic summary of the lures of the city. Her enticer plays very consciously on every fault the country girl is apt to find in her native surrounding and never mentions the slum as the part of the city scene she will have to cope with. This fantasy is much less naive than that conjured up by the hero's wife in *Joseph Zalmonah*, for it glorifies the city as having very tangible solutions for the myriad tiresome struggles that stifled young people in the country.

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[1] *The Story of Eva* (Boston, 1901), p. 2.

[2] Reginald W. Kauffman, *The House of Bondage* (1910; rpt. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 1968), pp. 20-21.

But as usual with these more forthright depictions, the specification of the heroine's revulsion on arrival in the slums is as thoroughly set forth as are her ideal images of the city beforehand. Reaching New York late at night, Mary and her seducer find it still very much alive:

> Some of the shops were still open, and the wide pavements on either side were black with countermarching processions of people, moving with the steady rapidity and stolidity of a swarm of ants....Vaguely, unreasoningly, but with the unquestioning acceptance of a child, she felt New York as a terrible, solidified unity; as a vast malevolent consciousness; as a living prison that implacably and resistlessly raised itself on every hand and on every hand shut her in forever. (p. 32)

And in her fear Mary unwittingly clings all the closer to the man who has lured her to the city. The bustling scene around the heroine is all the more frightening, described as it is through her unprepared reactions.

Later, the more familiar Mary becomes with her actual slum neighborhood, the more particularly its repulsiveness is portrayed. One street is called "a hectic thoroughfare" that is so crowded

> as to be no thoroughfare at all, but only a tossing fever-dream, a whirling phantasmagoria of noisy shadows, grotesque and reasonless. It seems a street with a bad conscience, for it never sleeps.
>
> The dawn, even in summertime, hesitates long before it comes shivering up from the crowded East River to drop a few grudged rays of anaemic light on Rivington Street. Already, out of the humming courts, the black alleys, and the foul passages that feed this avenue as gutters feed a sewer, a long funeral procession of little handcarts has groped its way and taken a mournful stand beside the fetid curbs; and soon, pausing at these carts to buy the rank morsels of breakfast that there is never time to eat at home, the gray army of the workers begins to scurry westward.
>
> First come the market-laborers, with shoulders bowed and muscles cramped from the bearing of many burdens....
>
> The street is not emptied of them before it is filled again, now by solemn children on their way to school, children whose gaze is fixed, whose mouths are maturely set, and whose voices, when they are heard at all, are high, strident, nervous. (p. 192)

Kauffman presents four pages of intense, specific detail of this street's bustle: workers, venders' carts, a multitude of small shops, elevated trains, and police patrol wagons are all seen in a rushing, crowded panorama. This rendition of humanity tightly packed into the slums seems an accurate fictional account of the ghetto scenes in photographs of the period.

To capture the real impact of the slum's unappealing appearance, these authors wisely use the reactions of impressionable, fresh characters. This method contrasts sharply with that of the more romantic novelists. Their elaborate descriptions of the city's underside came most often from characters of wealth and position familiar with the slum, although they did not live there, and able to view it as entertainment. But instead of a pageant to be enjoyed by a spectator, the slum scenes in this last group of novels evoke dark, forbidding threats to characters very much involved with the setting. Images of inhuman crowding, dark confinement and anonymous skyscrapers abound in these uncomfortable reactions to the slum. Characters whose stake is large cannot view all the din and confusion as an exotic amusement. And authors use these anxious first impressions to communicate a complex, often terrifying portrait. The slum, they seem to say, far from a merely fascinating diversion, is a threat of monumental proportions to those expecting the luxury of life on Fifth Avenue. In short, such descriptions begin to give considerably deeper interpretations of the city slum than do the fanciful, romantic passages presented earlier.

The seven main novels to be discussed next go beyond accurate descriptions of newcomers' reactions to the slum and utilize the facts of tenement life faithfully in plots and characterizations throughout their stories. Like the romantic novels, these works are set in city

slums and depict the day-to-day struggles of those who live there. But the novels in this second category, as seen already in their renditions of the slum's appearances, recognize the slum reality and refuse to translate it into trivial, sentimental stories of cheery, romantic love and easy success. These authors do not see the slum as a somewhat unusual setting for comedies, love stories, or sensational exposé-like fiction. Rather, they focus on how slum residents cope with the ordinary complications of mere survival. With the possible exceptions of Upton Sinclair and Abraham Cahan, these authors made no lasting contribution to the growth of the American novel; but they do use the facts of slum life outlined in Chapter One in ways that often begin to mirror those facts accurately.

After Bread by Henryk Sienkiewicz, already noted as offering authentic slum description, deserves further discussion. In 1896, the year before *After Bread* was published, this Polish author had a phenomenal best-seller in *Quo Vadis?*; but the story of Lorenz Toporek and his daughter Mary was never to have the public success of the author's Christian epic. After their discouraging passage and landing, the Toporeks' decline becomes increasingly rapid. For most of the book they search for simple work they can perform without a knowledge of English and for lodgings which they can afford to rent. They do not feel at home in the immigrant ghetto, for the "dirt, filth, disorder, and human misery"[1] are so different from the peace of their rural Polish home that they feel thrown into a totally unimaginable, alien world.

Soon their predicament is bad enough that Toporek is convinced the only solution is to do away with himself and his daughter. In a terrifying

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[1]Sienkiewicz, *After Bread*, p. 56.

scene, he forces the girl into the harbor waters until her protests become so pathetic that he changes his mind. Even their migration to Arkansas, which seems to offer an answer to their difficulties, is to no avail. While their health improves with steady doses of fresh air, sunshine, and hard work, their pioneer community begins to lose hope when quarrels increase among settlers, their work never seems to end, and sickness is rampant. Finally, with things as bad in the country as they had been in New York, Toporek drowns in a flood and Mary is left to make her own way. The novel ends soon after with Mary's death back in New York: she had gravitated back to the city, but found no one there whom she knew and consequently lost her desire to keep fighting.

Similar to *After Bread* in its depiction of immigrant troubles is Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1905). Little need be said about the fame and influence of this work. A thoroughly successful muckraking novel, it appeared on the *Bookman* best-seller lists for eleven months in 1906 and 1907, as readers lost sight of Sinclair's Socialist message in the furor stirred up over unsanitary meat-packing processes. Like *After Bread, The Jungle* is a forthright, grim account of East European immigrants' grueling encounter with the American slum. The story is about Jurgis Rudkus, his band of twelve companions, and how they fared in Chicago's stockyard slums. The plot is a complex series of partial victories followed by new problems that are worse than all those that came before. Jurgis sweeps up livestock remains on the slaughter house "killing beds" and shovels fertilizer. But he is blacklisted from all work after he beats up his boss for making advances to his wife, Ona. Finally, as the group's hopes grow dimmer, Ona dies in childbirth in their dirty garret and their one-and-a-half year old son drowns soon after in a water-filled hole on the street in front of their dwelling.

Sinclair extracts as much vivid detail as possible from each event: every repulsive job, shabby home, missed rent payment, and lingering illness is reported in pages of seemingly never-ending specification.

Little wonder that after all his high hopes have vanished, Jurgis becomes bitter against the meat-packing establishment that owns his tenement home as well as controls his employment.

> Their justice--it was a lie, it was a lie, a hideous, brutal lie, a thing too black and hateful for any world but a world of nightmares. It was a sham and a loathsome mockery. There was no justice, there was no right, anywhere in it--it was only force, it was tyranny, the will and the power, reckless and unrestrained! They had ground him beneath their heel, they had devoured all his substance.[1]

Unable to advance or even maintain his present position (he loses one job because of a sprained ankle that requires two months' rest), and unable to keep up exorbitant rent on inadequate housing, Jurgis naturally begins to raise pointed questions about the system in which he feels trapped.

A somewhat flamboyant example of how Sinclair puts all crises behind his characters then suddenly brings down new, insurmountable conflicts upon them takes place toward the conclusion, when Jurgis has become a street tramp. He meets a drunken society lad on the street, who strikes up a conversation, takes Jurgis home with him, and gives him a hundred-dollar bill with which to pay their cabfare. Seeing an easy opportunity to get back on his feet, Jurgis keeps the bill; at his lowest point since arriving in America a miracle has intervened to save him. But when he tries to break the bill in a saloon, the bartender recognizes *his* chance for a quick killing, when he sees Jurgis' shabby clothing, and returns change for a single dollar. With this incident begins Jurgis' life of crime.

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[1]Sinclair, *The Jungle*, p. 161.

This last defeat, however, leads to his political involvement and enthusiasm for Socialism, Sinclair's real point, fully explicated only in the last seventh of the novel. In the end Jurgis seems to have found a new life as slums and stockyards disappear and Socialist rhetoric comes to the fore. Such a conclusion provides more hope than that in *After Bread*, but in the light of all that comes before it, the propaganda seems unfaithful, inaccurate, and out of place: it represents an unfortunate reliance on dogma at a crucial place in the novel where continued emphasis on the material texture of the hero's life would have been more appropriate.

One of the most poignant accounts of immigrant problems is *Yekl* (1896), a short novel by the Jewish author Abraham Cahan, himself an immigrant from Russia in 1882. A minor realist praised by Howells for his tales of ghetto life, Cahan was active on New York Yiddish journals and in Socialist labor movements around 1900. Unlike the works of Sienkiewicz and Sinclair, which concentrate on the physical toll of the ghetto on the newly arrived foreigner, *Yekl* deals with the loss of cultural identity, a focus that gives it more depth and complexity than any work in this study. Rather than the sordid slum setting, the center of attention is the hero's drastic changes in character.

Yekl Podkovnik comes to America to earn a better living, exchanges his Jewish name for "Jake," and otherwise adjusts very quickly to his new surroundings. Declining to tell his new friends about his wife, Gitl, and their daughter who wait in Russia to follow him to America, Yekl abandons his religious practices and becomes something of a slum dandy. Finally, however, he must send for his family. Their arrival, rather than bringing Yekl to his senses, only inconveniences and irritates him; their "greenhorn," old-country ways embarrass this modern, Americanized "Yankee feller." Before long Yekl becomes impatient with

his wife's slowness in discarding their traditional heritage and old-fashioned religious practices, and he finds himself more attached to his American girl friend, Mamie, than to Gitl. In the end Yekl gets a divorce and runs off with Mamie. Gitl, for her part, looks forward to possible marriage to a well-mannered, orthodox neighbor, Mr. Bernstein.

Throughout this story Cahan displays a sincere, concerned point of view. He has no political message, no sensational slum scenes to depict, and generally is not bent on simply amusing his readers. Rather, he is serious about his characters and wants to capture the reality of their predicament as accurately as possible. And, as Elwood Lawrence notes, Cahan does so with notable success:

> The striking feature, for the 1890's, is the objectivity with which Cahan describes the immigrant background and characters. These, one feels, are immigrants to the life.[1]

With minimal details of the slum setting, Cahan presents the ghetto not as a purely physical threat, but as a subtle destroyer of tradition that was meant to sustain and give a sense of an abiding community. He is clearly anxious for those like Yekl, even though he resorts to no outright moralizing. The final chapter, relating the divorce and Yekl's plans with Mamie, is titled "A Defeated Victor"; and in its closing lines the hero begins to have some second thoughts about his decisions. He wonders if he is not committing himself too soon after his blessed release from the intolerable Gitl. But worse than his yearning

> for a taste of liberty was a feeling which was now gaining upon him, that instead of a conqueror, he had emerged...the victim of an ignominious defeat.

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[1]Elwood P. Lawrence, "The Immigrant in American Fiction, 1890-1920," Diss. Western Reserve 1943, p. 362.

He pictures Gitl, Bernstein, and his daughter and "their future seemed bright with joy, while his own loomed dark and impenetrable."[1] The immigrant ghetto lured Yekl to it, but after the enchantment was gone offered him only scant feelings of stable community. The new world has turned a willing Yekl into a flighty, materialistic pleasure-seeker who too late begins to realize the importance of the cultural background he has cast off. And the realization of this loss is perhaps as tragic as the usual physical deprivations catalogued in most slum fiction.

All three of these novels of immigrant trials are moving portrayals of the slum's destruction of unsuspecting new arrivals who are totally unequipped to cope with its rigorous challenge. *Yekl* speaks of the deviously demoralizing effects of fast-paced, amoral ghetto life on a young man on his own and unsupported by the stable, meaningful traditions of his native land. *After Bread* and *The Jungle* give unsparingly grim accounts of the harsh conditions awaiting immigrants in American slums. Basing their expectations on the pre-industrial image of the country as a democratic paradise offering cheap land and unlimited possibilities for success, these people are understandably surprised to find themselves crowded into foul tenements, often unemployed, and soon yearning for the simplicity and peacefulness of their native lands. Unlike the gay foreigners in Townsend's *A Daughter of the Tenements*, the picturesque waifs in Riis's *Children of the Tenements*, or the humorous con-men of Glass's *Potash and Perlmutter*, the immigrants in these more fully developed works seem real people facing desperate situations that are seldom glossed over to create a pretty, amusing entertainment. These fictional renditions of the slum experience recognize its real severity for some. They contribute a sympathetic, honest account of the

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[1]Abraham Cahan, *Yekl* (1896; rpt. New York, 1970), p. 89.

immigrant's predicament, avoiding both melodrama and sentimental stereotypes to speak about this uncomfortable subject.

Native Americans face the same kinds of arduous slum challenges in other conscientiously accurate slum novels, especially Paul. L. Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods* (1902), Lillian W. Betts's *The Story of an East-Side Family* (1903), and Reginald W. Kauffman's *The House of Bondage* (1910). In spite of the advantage of language and familiarity with American customs, native characters in these novels seem to have as much trouble with survival in the slum as do the foreign-born. But some explanation for their equally difficult assimilation can be offered. The newcomer born and reared in a rural home could be just as startled as an immigrant by the city slum. The rural Midwest seems to have been as fertile a spawning ground as Eastern Europe for myths of quick success in the city. Arthur Schlesinger notes that "the bright attractions of the city" were powerful, and "after the manner of human nature, the country dweller was apt to compare the worst features of his own lot with the best aspects of urban life."[1] And what did it matter if the comparisons grew into idealizations of the new life cities might offer? But regardless of the niceties of the dream, the slum awaited all who were unable to succeed in the city and make their hopes come true.

Novels on the slum experiences of the Negro, neither precisely an immigrant nor a native, were not yet common around the turn of the century. Most black writers or whites writing about blacks were still preoccupied with the largely Southern and rural post-Civil War struggles of the Negro. Albion W. Tourgée deals with the new ambiguities in race relations in books like *Murvale Eastman* (1890) and *Pactolus Prime* (1890),

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[1]Schlesinger, *The Rise of the City*, p. 60.

but his novels are not as much fiction as rhetorical tracts. The latter novel has a solid, urban atmosphere and its Washington, D.C., bootblack waxes bitter on the continuing oppression of the Negro; but these lengthy, didactic commentaries cannot substitute for developed plot or characterization.

A more accurate fictional account of racial problems, though it still avoids the Negro's worst dilemmas in the slum, is Bliss Perry's *The Plated City* (1895). This story is about a light-skinned Negro, Esther Beaulieu, and her half-brother, Tom. Esther is a strike leader at the local metal-plating factory and Tom a fledgling baseball player. Both are aided in making their way respectably by Dr. James Atwood, wealthy owner of the plating works and, it turns out, Tom's uncle. Although the story is shallow, it at least touches briefly on the prejudice toward blacks in a Northern industrial town. Its controversial topic and its romantic love interests (two marriages, including that of Esther and a bold, young lawyer), undoubtedly helped *The Plated City* to make the *Bookman's* best-seller list for one month in 1895.

The best novel during these years on the Negro and the slums, one similar to *Yekl* in its attention to the slum's demoralization of those willing to abandon their heritage, is Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods* (1902). The son of a slave, Dunbar was a poet and another writer supported by Howells. One of four novels on various black problems he wrote between 1898 and 1902, this work tells of Fannie Hamilton, her children, and their migration to New York after the head of their family, Berry, has been wrongly imprisoned for theft. Once in New York the mother and daughter are fearful and uncertain, but the son, Joe, is as fascinated as Yekl by the fast pace of the ghetto. He soon takes up with a flashy showgirl, confirming his mother's worse suspicions about

the slum influence. And things get even worse before the novel ends: Joe is imprisoned for killing his girl friend after she rejects him, and the daughter, Kitty, has been enticed into joining the chorus line in a local theater. All these entanglements are convincing enough in the first half of the book, but toward the end resolutions begin to seem overly dramatic. Berry is proven innocent and released from prison, makes his way to New York, and is reunited with Fannie after her new husband has been conveniently killed in a fight. Finally, despite the defeat they feel in Joe's imprisonment and Kitty's stage career, Berry and Fannie return contentedly to the South to live out their remaining days in peace.

Unlike Cahan's unobtrusive message about the corrosive influence of the slum on susceptible young people, *The Sport of the Gods* hammers home the point repeatedly without simply letting the story convey the moral. Early in the novel Dunbar describes the dangerously narcotic effect of the slum's superficial gaiety on the newcomer: its "subtle, insidious wine" will attract and

> begin to intoxicate him. Then, if he be wise, he will go away, any place,--yes, he will even go over to Jersey. But if he be a fool, he will stay and stay on until the very streets are his chums and certain buildings and corners his best friends.[1]

Further along the author becomes even more horrified as Joe and Kitty sink lower. Describing the Banner Club, a ghetto night spot where Joe goes to dance to ragtime music, Dunbar is direct in his condemnation:

> It was composed of all sorts and conditions of men, educated and uneducated, dishonest and less so, of the good, the bad, and the--unexposed. Parasites came there to find victims, politicians for votes, reporters for news, and artists of all kinds for colour and inspiration.
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[1]Paul Laurence Dunbar, *The Sport of the Gods* (1902; Facsimile rpt. Miami, Florida, 1969), pp. 82-83.

> Here the rounders congregated, or came and spent the hours until it was time to go forth to bout or assignation. Here too came sometimes the curious who wanted to see something of the other side of life....Of course, the place was a social cesspool, generating a poisonous miasma and reeking with the stench of decayed and rotten moralities. There is no defence to be made for it. But what do you expect when false idealism and fevered ambition come face to face with catering cupidity? (pp. 117-118)

In the end Dunbar takes two pages to summarize his feelings about the slum and its meaning for blacks, even though by that point his unbridled hatred for all city ways is clear. This further eloquent sermonizing adds up to a firm belief that the South, as backward as it might be, is more congenial for the Negro than the urban North. "Woollen-shirted, brown-jeaned simplicity" in the rural South "is infinitely better than broad-clothed degradation" in the Northern ghetto, Dunbar says. And it is "better and nobler" for Negroes "to sing to God across the Southern fields than to dance for rowdies in the Northern halls" (p. 213).

A fine novel on white, native slum residents that is more real than the sugary, unconvincing romantic portrayals, but less brutally pessimistic than the account of immigrant life in *The Jungle*, is *The Story of an East-Side Family* (1903) by Lillian W. Betts. This book is a panoramic sweep of an entire generation: the hero, Jack Kerry, is introduced at age eleven, then followed through marriage, parenthood, old age, and death. Despite an extremely loose organization, the novel is an intricate and believable portrait both of Jack's successes and his failures. Betts does a superb job of balancing his achievements with moderate setbacks that add convincing detail while never overwhelming Jack completely. He marries his childhood sweetheart, Mary Cahill, when he is out of work, and they must live at first in a single room above a grocery, using two soapboxes for furniture. Later Jack sells vegetables and fruits from

his own cart, the kind of work he likes best, but he still has periods of unemployment and failure throughout the novel. Mary gives birth to five children over the years, but once is pregnant when Jack is out of work and the baby dies at birth, probably because of poor pre-natal nourishment. Even the couple's old age is not completely serene, for in addition to the normal problems involving their children's growth into adulthood, some unusual hardships arise: one son, for example, is a special disappointment, deserting a girl who loves him, causing her to commit suicide, and later leaving the girl he does marry for the wife of a friend. In short, Jack's life over a long period is seen as a complex series of ups and downs; he has his triumphs, but they are never easily earned.

The long time-span of this work and its objective, many-faceted picture of these people's lives gives the impression that Jack and Mary are playing roles in a large production over which they have no control. They manage to emerge intact and more or less ahead of the game, but only because of slightly better-than-average luck: no phenomenal windfall saves them from having to deal with all the natural, unpleasant trials of life, nor does their honesty and hard work lift them above the strife and toil all about them. In the end Jack loses his last job, a factory position, and soon is ill with consumption. But, although he seems to end his life on a somewhat depressing note, he and Mary are closer than ever as the end approaches. They can look back with satisfaction at the procession of their lives and accept their defeats and victories with the same equanimity Betts demonstrates when assessing the Kerry's slum neighborhood:

> Without theories or laws, without leaders or followers, the great community life, whose capital is common experiences and common limitations, develops.

> No sociological microscope makes these community members self-conscious. Life is lived in careless ease and stoical endurance.[1]

It is this open point of view that makes *The Story of an East-Side Family* credible. This conception of slum life as fraught with universal quandaries that are aggravated by unusually severe poverty is untouched by romantic sentimentalism that thrusts ecstatic happiness on its characters or by a determinism so intense that it demolishes any possibility of free will. Betts's only use of stereotyped, exotic characterization occurs in a few passages like the following that still convey slum life plausibly, despite their emotion.

> Men and women with bundles of finished and unfinished coats hurry along with unseeing eyes. Minutes are pennies, and pennies their only known measure of values. Here and there a gay, rollicking laugh outvoices the babel of tongues, proving that the spirit of childhood still remains in spite of poverty and hard work, or, worse, no work. The danger of bankruptcy never faces the man who sells all his stock each day at a profit that pays his rent and buys black bread and coffee. The sharp sting of defeated ambition never enters the heart of the woman whose social set uses the same assembly-room--the street. She has the benefit of her neighbors' experience in every transaction. (p. 130)

Finally, a novel similar in its inclusive depiction of the slum and perhaps the most authentic and moving rendition of the horrors of tenement life is Reginald Wright Kauffman's *The House of Bondage* (1910). This work, including an appendix entitled "White Slave Traffic," makes use of Kauffman's skills acquired writing for the *Saturday Evening Post*. After the disillusioning arrival in New York mentioned earlier, Mary Denbigh's plight only worsens. After an escape from Rose Légère's bawdy house, Mary finds she can hold a respectable position like housework or waiting

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[1]Lillian W. Betts, *The Story of an East-Side Family* (New York, 1903), pp. 130-131.

table only so long as her past is a secret. In abject acceptance of her plight and finding no help from the petty politicians and well-to-do young men she has gotten to know through Mrs. Légère, she turns to streetwalking. Finally, Mary goes back to her Pennsylvania home, but is rejected outright by her family. Then, admitting defeat, she returns to New York and Mrs. Légère's house, begging to be taken in. In a crushing finale, the madam refuses and tells Mary, "'You see, the life's got you...you're all in.'"[1]

A *Bookman's* best-seller for seven months in 1911, this novel contains a richly various network of sub-plots. Kate Flanagan, the girlfriend of a German milkman who helps Mary escape from prostitution, works at the Lennox Department Store, putting up with the unwelcome advances of her superiors. Marion Lennox, daughter of the store owner, volunteers for settlement-house work. Carrie Berkowicz, a roommate of Kate, is an unemployed shirt-waist maker on strike throughout most of the book. All these seemingly unrelated figures begin to come together in the conclusion: wandering destitute through the streets, Mary comes by chance across the wedding of Marion to Judge Wesley Dyker, who as a lawyer had also helped Mary escape from Mrs. Légère. Also in the crowd is Katie Flanagan, now married to the milkman. All this extraneous material detracts at times from Mary's story, but occasionally it offers poignant contrasts in success to the failure of the heroine.

A more interesting aspect of this novel is the author's somewhat didactic commentary on prostitution as the main slum evil. Once she is seduced, lured into the brothel, "ruined," and kept indefinitely as a white slave, Kauffman often digresses by way of conversations among the

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[1]Kauffman, *The House of Bondage*, p. 466.

girls into topics such as the slave trade in general, the function of pimps (called "slavers"), and the intricacies of streetwalking. Kauffman reports the discussion between Mary and her milkman-rescuer on the pervasive nature of prostitution:

> He told her of the hundreds of thousands of girls that are annually caught in the great net; of how five thousand new ones are every year needed to maintain Chicago's standing supply of twenty-five thousand; of how Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, San Francisco--all the cities and the towns--are served proportionately, and of how, above all, from the crowded East Side of New York, there are dragged each week hundreds of children and young women no one of whom, if sold outright, brings as much as a capable horse. (p. 256)

The story often comes to a complete stop for Kauffman to moralize in such a way on the corruption of all those involved in prostitution. The recruiter of prostitutes is singled out as a devious, extremely dangerous sort of ghetto scum, coaxing girls into temptation:

> Wherever there is squalor seeking ease, he is there. Wherever there is distress crying for succor, discontent complaining for relief, weariness sighing for rest, there is this missionary, this "cadet," offering the quack salvation of his temporal church. He knows and takes subtle advantage of the Jewish sisters sent to work for the education of Jewish brothers; the Irish, the Germans, the Russians, and the Syrians ground in one or another economic mill; the restless neurotic native-daughters untrained for work and spoiled for play. He is at the door of the factory when it releases its white-faced women for a breath of night air; he is at the cheap lunch-room where the stenographers bolt unwholesome noonday food handed about by underpaid waitresses; he lurks around the corner for the servant and the shop-clerk. He remembers that these are girls too tired to do household work in their evenings, too untaught to find continued solace in books; that they must go out, that they must move about; and so he passes his own nights at the restaurants and theaters, the moving-picture shows, the dancing academies, the dance-halls. (pp. 324-325)

Although Kauffman's tone is overly melodramatic, the substance of his concern is real. Observers of late nineteenth century urbanization such as B. O. Flower and William Stead, as well as present-day historians

like Blake McKelvey and Foster R. Dulles, confirm that prostitution and the routing of susceptible young girls into it were monumental problems. McKelvey relates, for example, that the census of 1880 identified 517 brothels in Philadelphia, and that a movement to control prostitution did not gain much support until 1910.[1] And Dulles notes that in the 1890's

> the line between virtue and vice was hard to distinguish; perfectly respectable places of entertainment shaded off imperceptibly into notorious dives. There were plenty of dance-halls that found "the young mechanics and dressmakers in their glory," but as many where the floor was crowded with prostitutes. Every large city had its red-light district given over to saloons and sporting-houses. Drinking, gambling, and prostitution had become tremendous social problems as the size of the constantly growing cities made control more and more difficult, particularly when politics formed its profitable alliance with vice.[2]

Other sections of *The House of Bondage* go further than Kauffman's little sermons to illustrate this slum evil. In one episode toward the conclusion Mary is initiated into streetwalking by a girl who is already experienced. Here the author very successfully combines solid comment on the foulness of prostitution and a moving, realistic description of human degradation:

> "You just put on your glad rags at eight o'clock an' walk Broadway from Twenty-third to Forty-second. If you can hustle, you can land half a dozen before one o'clock...Stop an' look in the store windows, an' they'll come like flies. But always be sure to get your money first. Ask 'em two dollars if they look that strong, or one if they're cheap guys--but don't ever take a cent less'n fifty cents. I always gets the two-plunk myself, unless a piker stands out for a dark corner or hallway and tries the quarter game: then I go through his clothes for all he's got." (p. 379)

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[1] McKelvey, *The Urbanization of America*, pp. 94, 265.

[2] Dulles, *A History of Recreation*, p. 220.

By this point, however, Mary is already ill and bedraggled. She must continually lower her price from two dollars to fifty cents, and even then can only find takers among hopeless drunks staggering home late at night.

Such forthright treatment of real slum conditions distinguishes the best of these novels. From Sinclair's *The Jungle* to Kauffman's *The House of Bondage*, the works discussed in the second half of this chapter all approach particular, real pitfalls of slum life and give intensive, concerned accounts of them. They express the belief that not only the common, but even the uncommonly distasteful and grim can be translated into more than sensational, false stereotypes. Some of these authors attack individual urban ills they consider worthy of literary crusades; others simply want to capture and communicate the slum experience meaningfully. But with or without specific features of the slum as targets, all these works achieved remarkable popular success in an age that demanded, according to a critic in 1904,

> an honest, homely, virtuous story, plainly told,
> with an honest laugh in it, and even an honest tear
> for the credulous, and with never a difficult sentence
> nor an idea inaccessible to the most untrained minds.[1]

With such standards holding sway among the country's readers, four of the novels discussed in this section (*The House of Bondage*, *Jerry the Dreamer*, *The Plated City*, and *The Jungle*) still managed to appear on the *Bookman* best-seller lists, if not to sell as well as Kipling's poems or Francis M. Crawford's romances. The fact that they did do reasonably well indicates some Americans were willing to read about the slum in other than frivolous, sentimental, or comic stories. True, many of these novels are tinged with sensationalism, especially *The Jungle*; but for the most

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[1]Harriet Monroe, "Books that Have Passed the Hundred Thousand Mark," *Critic*, XLIV (February, 1904), p. 117.

part they are straightforward, honestly moving tales.

It must be admitted, however, that the romantic novels distinctly outsold the more realistic ones. Six of the romantic novelists (Ade, Friedman, Glass, Rice, Lewis, and Townsend) had at least one best-seller during these years, with a total of eleven of their relevant works making the lists. This record does indicate a solid public appreciation for slum material used in entertaining stories of success and romance. The best that can be said for such popular literature is, as Grant Knight notes, that it

> provided a therapeutic relaxation of the will... permitted an escape from the strait-jacket of routine, stimulated the fancy and the invention, often bulwarked the morals of persons not given to abstract thinking, frequently conveyed encouragement through its cheerfulness and its happy ending, and in short was invariably good fun.[1]

The use of the slum in fiction aiming at "good fun" seems at first incongruous: the authors are introducing one of the serious matters they hope to avoid. But, of course, they treat the slum in such a way that its reality is always transformed into harmless, sentimental pap. And such is the heart of their attitude toward the slum: rather than a subject for honest reaction or open investigation, they see it as matter for simple stories meant as sheer diversion, and so approach it with a certain bemused interest that lacks much concern for the plight of those living there or the responsibilities of those who do not.

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[1]Grant C. Knight, *The Strenuous Age in American Literature* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1954), pp. 217-218.

CHAPTER THREE

BEYOND DEPICTION, TOWARD SOLUTIONS

Some authors between 1890 and 1910 went further than simply using the slum as a setting for routine stories of love and success. The twenty-six novels to be discussed in this chapter all depict some particular problem of slum life and offer a solution of one sort or another to it. As might be expected, all the enumerated difficulties are economic, and the proposed answers range from the milder forms of change embodied in settlement houses to strikes and overt revolution. Eighteen novels to be considered first show minister missionaries and well-to-do young ladies forsaking their middle-class comforts and volunteering to work in slum settlements; seven of these present clergymen in the slums, eleven portray female social workers. A second group of eight novels features slum labor leaders and their efforts to help the worker; three depict extreme labor reactions, the last five show more moderate positions.

Many of the economic novels were written after 1900 and could not help but be influenced by the muckraking movement in journalism. Grant Knight notes that by 1905

> muckraking had become a lucrative occupation pursued by writers whose intentions and characters were rarely open to question and whose findings...must be related to the growing number of novels dedicated to a serious interpretation of the life of the time.[1]

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[1]Knight, *The Strenuous Age*, pp. 88-89.

But the relationship between the novelists of economic slum fiction and the muckrakers is an indirect one: few of these authors were practiced investigative reporters, and few among the muckrakers were active novelists. Further, the novels of ministers and social workers appeared mostly in the nineties, indicating that these works were not associated with muckraking but were simply a part of the general trend of some fiction toward facing life as it was instead of offering pleasant escape.

Before these main works are confronted, some general novels not dealing with the slum can be mentioned to demonstrate the increasingly accepted practice of fictionalizing economic strife. In Will Payne's *Jerry the Dreamer*, cited previously for its realistic description of the slum setting, a strike is a part of the plot and the hero is involved in labor's cause throughout the book. The economic interest here is only secondary in a work that concentrates largely on the hero's personal struggles to find satisfaction in his newspaper work and his marriage. Very similar is Brander Matthews' *A Confident To-morrow*, also mentioned for its authentic portrayal of the slum's appearance. This novel, too, deals mostly with an individual's striving for professional success, but at the same time manages to incorporate the messages of anarchistic characters as they relate to the hero's work on a reform-minded New York magazine.

Many other novels demonstrate this kind of peripheral interest in the workingman who lives in the slums. The period was such that many authors either agreed with, or at least felt the widespread acceptance of an opinion like that of novelist Linn Boyd Porter, who identified the "ideal work of fiction" has having "but one of three excuses for being;

It will either combat some evil, inculcate some lesson, or discuss some great issue."[1] This author's *Speaking of Ellen* (1890) strives for such seriousness, but unfortunately uses only the economic clichés of the day in an unnoteworthy story. Ellen is a mill-worker who leads her fellow employees against the oppressive capitalist Philip Westland. After a series of involved strikes, inflamed by the evil machinations of an English anarchist, the book ends with Ellen marrying the converted Westland, who promises to turn his mills into an experimental "socialistic community."

Thus, the slowly emerging public concern for the plight of workers was manifesting itself in fiction. While many novelists ignored or condemned violence and anarchy, they felt they could safely approach the larger issues of the worker's troubles if they offered only mildly socialistic solutions. "Subjects of social significance," James Hart points out, "were in demand, but, on the whole, their treatment could not be too realistic, too revolutionary, or too analytical if they were to find big audiences."[2] Such a treatment appears in Roy McCardell's *The Wage Slaves of New York* (1899). It broaches social issues by using a mill setting, but this is merely the background for a tale of adventure and intrigue involving a stolen invention, a crafty money-lender, kidnapping, and murder. Likewise, a novel by I. K. Friedman betrays its title, *The Radical* (1907) and follows the politician hero from defeated city alderman to Congressman fighting for bills to protect children who are "pale, hollow-eyed, driven by the whip of Greed along the hideous road that lies between the homes of want and the mills of Mammon."[3]

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[1] Linn Boyd Porter, *Speaking of Ellen* (New York, 1890), p. v.

[2] James D. Hart, *The Popular Book* (Berkeley, 1961), p. 173.

[3] I. K. Friedman, *The Radical* (New York, 1907), p. 103.

The first group of novels to be discussed here portray gracious young ladies and well-bred ministers giving up the security of their middle-class lives to work in settlement houses and missions combatting slum disorders like poverty and disease. This solution to economic questions was much more in tune with the conventional literary gentility of the day than were those in novels to be discussed later of workingmen standing up and demanding definite changes in the system they felt mistreated them. For despite the new awareness of slum problems, Christian good manners and sentiment were still the main ingredients in outstanding best-sellers from Ian Maclaren's *Beside the Bonnie Briar Bush* (1894) to Eleanor Abbott's *Molly Make-Believe* (1910). And among these mannerly books of reforming ministers and debutantes, four were best-sellers with a total of sixty monthly appearances on the *Bookman* lists.

Novels about the work of ministers in city slums received tremendous impetus from the popularity of Mrs. Humphrey Ward's *Robert Elsmere* (1888), mentioned at the beginning of Chapter Two. As Hart notes, most readers saw this work as

> an honest attempt to deal with the problems they themselves faced, both in their struggles with orthodoxy, and in their concern with the social effects of the machine age.[1]

In addition, Social Gospel thinkers like Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch advocated religious practice that was involved in issues like unemployment. Even controversy was fashionable as the more liberal point of view was sensationalized by Robert Ingersoll, a flamboyant agnostic, and clergymen-authors like Josiah Strong (*Twentieth Century City*, 1898) and William T. Stead (*If Christ Came to Chicago!*, 1894). In

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[1]Hart, p. 165.

contrast to the enduringly popular, conventional religious novels like *Quo Vadis?* (1896) or Hall Caine's *The Christian* (1897), many works not directly related to the concerns of this study routinely incorporated reform-minded, socially oriented ministers into their stories during these years. *Murvale Eastman: Christian Socialist* (1890) by Albion Tourgée, for example, tells of a preacher who shocks his congregation by proclaiming it should become involved in the daily struggles of working people and that hymn-singing and dreaming of heaven are worthless pursuits. Eastman follows his own philosophy and works incognito as a streetcar driver, learning about the workers' hardships firsthand and even becoming involved in a drivers' strike.

Or a novel like *The Better Man* (1910), by a clergyman named Cyrus Townsend Brady, neatly summarizes the whole confused religious outlook of the age in the conflict between two Episcopal priests, Lionel Barmore, pastor of a well-to-do, uninvolved parish, and Mark Stebbing, rector of a neighboring, poverty-stricken church. Barmore sides with management in a streetcar strike, while Stebbing supports the strikers and hopes he can help avert a long or serious walkout. The book overtly condemns Barmore and his aloof, uncommitted followers and glorifies Stebbing's association with the city's undesirables. When Stebbing feels discouraged about his work, a devoted laborer reminds him of what has been accomplished:

> "You've turned brutes into men and women. You've got a great following; there ain't nothing they wouldn't do for you, and every drunkard, thief, blackguard, and prostitute in the whole city is your friend. When any of 'em gets into trouble, do they send for Barmore, or any of his crowd? No; they want you, and the whole city wants you."[1]

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[1]Cyrus Townsend Brady, *The Better Man* (New York, 1910), p. 113.

None of this involvement is actually detailed in the novel, but Brady is clearly setting forth Stebbing as the ideal, socially concerned clergyman.

The first of seven main novels to be dealt with here that does detail a minister's slum involvement is *A Singular Life* (1894) by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward. Not to be confused with England's Mrs. Humphrey Ward, this author was a consistent writer of religious best-sellers, beginning with *A Peep at Number Five* (1851), a tour of a New England parsonage. Her greatest success was *The Gates Ajar* (1869), a description of a heaven in which the dead are revived to continue a care-free, blissful existence. But *A Singluar Life*, although distinctly more mundane than Mrs. Ward's previous work, was also a strong best-seller and appeared on the *Bookman* lists for seventeen months between 1895 and 1898. Set in the slums of a fishing town patterned after Gloucester, Massachusetts, this novel is one of the few examples of slum fiction offering a rural slum as conspicuous as the usual urban ones. Given the focus of this study on slums of large urban centers, *A Singular Life* is included only because its slums are depicted little differently from those of works set in New York or Chicago. Concentrating, for example, on evils characteristic of urban slums, saloons and prostitution, Ward paints an excruciating picture of Windover's worst street, ironically named "Angel Alley":

> Angel Alley overflowed with abomination, as the tides, befouled by the town, overflowed the reeking piers of the docks. In sailors' boarding-houses, in open bars, in hidden cellars, in billiard-rooms, in shooting-galleries, in dance-halls, and in worse, whiskey ran in rivers. At the banks of those black streams men and some women crawled and drank, flaunting or hiding their fiery thirst as the mood took them, and preying upon one another, each according to his power or his choice, as the chance of an evil hour decreed.
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> Girls with hard eyes and coarse mouths strutted up and down the alley in piteous numbers. Sights whose description cannot blot this page might have

> been detected in the shadows of the wharves and of the winding street.[1]

Determined to clean up this foul neighborhood, Emanuel Bayard comes to the town after having been refused ordination because of his lack of theological knowledge. He immediately sets about attacking the status quo by picking individuals suited for reformation and making regular church-attenders of them: the Italian, Job Slip, he saves from alcoholism; a young girl, Lena, from prostitution. Soon, because of his obvious concern for the derelicts of Angel Alley, Bayard's little mission church is crowded with the repentant:

> Good people, not quite certain whether their own reputations were injured or bettered by the fact, sat side by side with men and women who are not known to the pews of churches. The homeless were there, and the hopeless, the sinning, the miserable, the disgraced, the neglected, the "rats" of the wharves, and the outcasts of the dens....Against the wall, lines of rude, red faces crowded like cattle at a spring; men of the sea and the coast, men without homes or characters; that uninteresting and dangerous class which we dismiss in two idle words as the "floating population." Some of these men were sober; some were not; others were hovering midway between the two conditions. (pp. 137-138)

Bayard's efforts to close the saloons, like those of many fictional clergyman-reformers, are met with stiff resistance from liquor "interests," in this instance the obnoxious tavern owner Ben Trawl. Most of the novel's conflicts concern Bayard's reformation of alcoholics and Trawl's luring them back to the bars while threatening Bayard to cease meddling. For romantic interest, Trawl is convinced Bayard has stolen his girlfriend, and, in fact, she is attracted to the minister. But in another development typical of these novels, he falls in love with a non-slum resident,

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[1]Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward, *A Singular Life* (Boston, 1894), pp. 178-179.

Helen Carruth, the daughter of a conservative minister who disapproves of Bayard's ways.

The climax comes when Bayard's church is burnt down, presumably by Trawl and other tavern operators. But the undaunted minister immediately begins construction on a new building. The book ends with the dedication of the rebuilt mission, but the joy of this occasion is dampened when Bayard is fatally wounded by a stone thrown by someone in the crowd, again presumably Trawl. Why Ward chose to kill off her hero at the very end of the novel is a mystery perhaps answerable only by delving into what compelled her years before to write at such length on the appearances of heaven. But regardless of this unusual ending, the main point remains clear: Bayard's work in this village slum is humane and respectable for a man of God. After decades of escapist religious fare like *Ben-Hur*, works like *A Singular Life* demonstrated that popular taste was beginning to incorporate some of the period's liberal, intellectual ideology.

The following passage well illustrates Mrs. Ward's feeling that traditional religious thought does not confront realities like the slum. Bayard is criticizing his seminary training for its irrelevance to the outside world:

> "Oh, when I think about it!--Predestination, fore-ordination, sanctification, election, and botheration,--and never a lesson on the Christian socialism of our day, not a lecture to tell us how to save a poor, lost woman, how to reform a drunkard, what to do with gamblers and paupers and thieves, and worse, how to apply what we believe to common life and common sense--how to lift miserable creatures, scrambling up, and falling back into the mud as fast as they can scramble--people of no religion, no morals, no decency, no hope, no joy--who never see the inside of a church." (p. 153)

Bayard's objection is quite hypothetical, given his own superb ability to apply what he knows to "common life," including dramatic ploys like marching into brothels in Angel Alley and literally pulling out those

girls he feels can yet be saved. He needs no lessons on how to help the unfortunate. Rather, his little speech on the seminaries' shortsighted curriculums is simply the author speaking her conviction that religion can be more meaningful, more related to the obvious problems of the times. Though she can never bring herself to use the word "prostitute" for the fallen women she writes about, Mrs. Ward is stalwart in her insistence that what they represent should be faced and corrected.

A less credible treatment of a minister's work in the slums is *Dwellers in Gotham* (1898) by James Wesley Johnston, a Methodist minister and religious writer who used the pseudonym Annan Dale. In this work the Reverend Hugh Dunbar, a young middle-class clergyman, dedicates his life to helping the poor in a slum mission. Much of the novel contrasts his work with that of two friends, Edward Vaughen, a clerk in a New York brokerage firm, and John Disney, who is interested in social reform and gets a factory job to learn the workers' point of view. The main focus throughout is on the business pursuits of Vaughen and Disney (who eventually rises to the top in an iron mill and pledges to run it according to the golden rule) and their romantic attachments to young society ladies. In this respect the novel is no different from the literally hundreds of society romances during these years concerned only with the wealthy.

But Johnston's introduction of Dunbar and a smattering of slum acquaintances is a forthright criticism of the apathy of the city's well-to-do. The slum residents under Dunbar's care see him as a sympathetic representative of the classes above them which most often neglect the poor. Even the church is complacent:

> "There isn't a preacher in New York who dares to say the things that the 'Carpenter of Nazareth' said. The men who makes corners on wheat an' cotton, on 'most everything, don't want any such preachin' as the Carpenter preached. The Church nowadays is for rich people. The

> poor man is not wanted there. They say he is, but when one goes he knows enough not to go again. We can't count on anyone but ourselves, but if we will only stand together we are bound to win."[1]

Dunbar takes these criticisms to heart and always defends the poor when he mingles in society's better circles. He never actually takes part in a strike or does anything very tangible for the poor, but he is vociferous when talking to wealthy friends on slum evils. It is only unfortunate that Johnston did not give more attention to Dunbar's plans and actual activities in the slum, for toward the end too much attention is paid to the various upper-class characters and their romances and marriages. Consequently, Dunbar's participation in the lives of slum dwellers is de-emphasized.

Another novel in which a clergyman slum-worker competes with a large number of minor characters for a role in the story is *The Cage* (1907) by Charlotte Teller Hirsch. The minister here, Reverend Hartwell, is an older, conservative preacher less actively committed to aiding the poor than Emanuel Bayard or Hugh Dunbar. Rather, he would agree with a minister in a novel to be discussed later that "'it is impossible for any human being to starve in our free country.'"[2] Though Hartwell willingly gives up a wealthy Chicago church to live in a slum, his notions on salvation for its citizens are Biblical and spiritual rather than social or economic. For him,

> the law of the spirit...resignation, meekness, contentment with one's own lot, whatever that lot might be, was the great law of progress.[3]

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[1] James Wesley Johnston, *Dwellers in Gotham* (New York, 1898), p. 203.

[2] Dr. Wilkinson in Vida D. Scudder's *A Listener in Babel* (Boston, 1903), p. 153.

[3] Charlotte Teller Hirsch, *The Cage* (New York, 1907), pp. 84-85.

The entire novel portrays Hartwell's gentle but insistent promulgation of this view and the complex doings of the minor characters, which, in the end, serve to convince him he should pay at least as much attention to poor people's concerns of the flesh as to their spiritual worries.

The main character helping bring about Hartwell's conversion is his twenty-year-old daughter, Frederica. She becomes involved with an Austrian Socialist and adventurer, Eugene Harden, who is visiting the Hartwell home. Both Hartwell and Frederica's boy friend, Alec Sloane, son of a capitalist lumber-yard owner, are uneasy about Harden and his uncertain connections with radical labor movements. But the Austrian continues to influence Frederica, until in addition to opening her eyes to the plight of the slum dweller, he convinces her to marry him, even though she too has doubts about his background. But the villain, in the end, turns out to be another shadowy foreigner lurking in the wings, Gustav Lange, Harden's illegitimate half-brother, who has come to America to torment the man by spreading rumors that Harden has deserted a wife in Europe.

Much of this involved, romantic plotting has little or nothing to do with Reverend Hartwell and his relationship to the ghetto poor. Eventually, however, Hirsch makes a clearer connection between the minister and some of the other characters. A group of lumber workers led by Harden go on strike for an eight-hour day; Hartwell and the owner of the yards, Sloane, call for moderate arbitration. But when Frederica sides with Harden and the workers, Hartwell begins to see the ineffectiveness of his strictly spiritual approach to the problems of those in his new parish. In fact, even Frederica's rejected lover, Alec, is so moved by the rightness of the workers' cause, that he too joins the laborers' camp and begins investigating the legality of his father's actions during

the strike. So this novel eventually gets back to its serious message about a minister learning the real needs of slum residents, but only after stretches of intrigue and romance that are so long as greatly to diminish the impact of Mrs. Hirsch's point.

The best known author of slum novels which utilized reform-minded ministers as heroes was Charles M. Sheldon, a Topeka clergyman who turned his Sunday sermons into best-selling fiction. Faced with faltering attendance in his Central Congregational Church, Sheldon decided to try reading serialized stories to his flock. The idea was so successful that not only was his church filled to overflowing each week, but publishers soon wanted to put out his stories in book form. The most outstanding seller of all Sheldon's works was *In His Steps* (1896), the exact sales of which are difficult to gauge, because a faulty copyright opened the way to a number of bootlegged editions. Estimates range from the inflated figure of twenty million copies sold worldwide, a guess by the enthusiastic Sheldon himself taken at face value by many researchers on the history of best-sellers, to Frank L. Mott's more probable conjecture of two million.[1] The *Bookman* lists cited one edition of the novel for six months in 1898.

The first of Reverend Sheldon's novels to focus on slum problems was *The Crucifixion of Phillip Strong* (1893).[2] Like all of Sheldon's tales, it deals with what he knew best: a minister trying to make his faith relevant to the vital issues in the community. Instead of taking his crusade into the slum, Philip Strong decides to work with the wealthy church of a manufacturing town called Milton and encourage it to sympathize with laborers' troubles.

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[1]Frank Luther Mott, *Golden Multitudes* (New York, 1947), pp. 196-197.

[2]Although the hero is "Philip" throughout the novel, the title page spells it "Phillip."

> "A town of about fifty thousand working men, half of them foreigners, a town with more than sixty saloons in full blast, a town with seven churches of as many different denominations all situated on one street, and that street the most fashionable in the place, a town where the police records show an amount of crime and depravity almost unparalleled in municipal annals--surely such a place presents an opportunity for the true church of Christ to do some splendid work."[1]

From the beginning Strong encounters resistance to his sermons on sacrifice and giving. Each week he takes on a new evil, but continually emphasizes the sins of owning tenement property and of allowing saloons to remain open to corrupt the poor. With only scattered support, Strong finally alienates almost all his parishioners when he moves out of his luxurious parsonage into the slums and donates half his salary ($1000) to an orphanage. After he asks his members to "go into the tenement district and redeem it by the power of personal sacrifice and personal presence" (p. 235), they vote to dismiss him. And in the end Strong dies heartbroken, while delivering his last sermon.

But prior to this melodramatic conclusion, he has not had much success or encouragement anyway. In one incident he suggests the church's Negro sexton for membership, but the congregation votes the man down. In addition, Strong is shot and wounded by saloon owners at one point in a losing battle to sensitize people to the problems of slum life. Despite all the dramatic conflict that puts this novel in the same category as most other romantic tales of the slum, the hero's continual defeat makes it a rarity among fanciful treatments. Sheldon presents terror and disaster to his public with the same objective as a colonial, Calvinistic sermonizer: to teach his listeners by fervid exhortation and negative example how to lead more Christian lives. He seeks to move people by combining a melodramatic story and stern, old-fashioned moralization.

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[1] Charles M. Sheldon, *The Crucifixion of Phillip Strong* (New York, 1893), pp. 12-13.

Sheldon's attitude toward the slum is one of serious concern, even though the presentation of his distress is theatric and didactic. The same is true of a later novel, *The Redemption of Freetown* (1898), in which the ultimate message is that the self-satisfied *can* be moved to real action against slum ills. Reverend Howard Douglass works toward establishing a mission for the Negro ghetto of Freetown, believing that "'when the Christian world is willing to give itself to the redemption of the unchristian world, it will be redeemed.'"[1] Unlike Strong, Douglass encounters nothing but sympathetic, enthusiastic help from all the members of his church. Even when an escaped Negro prisoner is blamed for the fatal beating of a prominent judge's son, the people's support for Douglass does not weaken. In fact, the murdered boy's mother and fiancée both contribute even more because of the young man's death, the first donating two thousand dollars, the second offering to live at the new settlement. All the white citizens seem to agree with the judge's assessment early in the book that Freetown's troubles are the responsibility of the well-off, white majority:

> "Somehow I cannot help connecting the crime in Freetown, the dissipation and immorality in that district, with the same thing in what we call our best society. Somehow I am oppressed by the feeling that this city will suffer some great calamity even in its best homes because we have allowed such evils to grow up uncorrected in the right way. It seems to me sometimes as I sit in my place on the bench, that a judgment is hanging over this city so fair in its outward appearance, yet so wrong in much of its human life." (pp. 16-17)

In the end nearly everyone in the town is working to make the mission a success, even some originally hesitant society women. Besides the death of the judge's son, the only unhappy note is the suicide of the

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[1] *The Redemption of Freetown* (Boston, 1898), p. 40.

Negro falsely accused of the murder. But by the novel's end, even these deaths seem only minor setbacks compared with the success of the new mission: the conclusion glorifies its achievements over the next fifteen years, including a bustling kindergarten and nursery, reading rooms, sewing rooms, music rooms, and a "house-keeping department" that trains servants "sought by the best families in the city" (p. 58). Today this kind of work appears patronizing and old-fashioned. But in 1898 there could be little question about the humanity of Sheldon's progressive ideas. Though he too easily glosses over the impediments a minister like Douglass would face in any age, he does attempt to discuss actual social conditions and to propose ways the established society can begin to rectify them.

This same optimism about possibilities for change is very much a part of *In His Steps*, probably the most widely read book in this study, even discounting Sheldon's report of its sales. The point of this novel, the same as in all Sheldon's writing, is somewhat bluntly singled out by Larzer Ziff:

> The reality that counts is the Christlike gesture, not the problems which lead to prostitution or other social evils, because all problems, rest assured, will eventually yield before it.[1]

Such an assessment applies perfectly to this story of church members pledging to ask "What would Jesus do?" before they make any important decisions. The orgy of altruism that follows means to show that when given a little push, the heretofore insensitive individual will do all in his power to help those around him in trouble. A soprano in the church choir is offered a contract by a comic opera company, but decides to

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[1]Ziff, *The American 1890s*, p. 86.

sing with a local evangelist in the slums. A society heiress plucks a young girl from a slum brothel and takes her home to be cleaned up. A newspaper editor refuses to print crime scandals and omits a Sunday edition in an effort to establish a "Christian daily."

The leader of all this sacrifice is Reverend Henry Maxwell, who himself gives up a summer in Europe to let a slum family spend time in the country and organizes Saturday revivals to preach against the slum evil he feels is greatest, the saloon. Despite the usual strong liquor interests, Maxwell sets up a gigantic tent and begins saving souls from the depravity of drinking.

> The complete regeneration revealed in the sight of drunken, vile, debauched humanity kneeling down to give itself to a life of purity and Christlikeness--oh, it was surely a witness to the superhuman in the world!...All these pictures drawn by the Holy Spirit in the human tragedies brought to a climax there in the most abandoned spot in all Raymond.[1]

Regardless of setbacks that in other circumstances would demolish such efforts, Maxwell's work speeds ahead. Not even the city's vote to keep all the saloons in operation can keep him from persevering and spreading his Christian message to a large Chicago church. There too, the experiment of following in Jesus' footsteps is taken up with great success.

This novel is usually considered a fictional example of the nineties' Social Gospel movement. But like the pessimism and melodrama in *The Crucifixion of Phillip Strong*, elements here work against the believability of the minister-reformer's attempt to change social evils. First, the dramatic and romantic plots Sheldon used to keep up his congregation's interest put the book firmly in the class of incredible slum fiction, not straightforward accounts. All the members of Maxwell's church who

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[1] *In His Steps* (1896; rpt. Old Tappan, N.J., 1968), p. 68.

agree to participate in his experiment succeed rather decisively and easily in a program that, at the least, would be arduous and frustrating. None of the participants ever seems to have any question about what Jesus would do in any particular situation, and none ever comes close to faltering and doing the human thing rather than the divine. In addition, the plot does nothing to create a real picture of Christians confronting slum life: the romantic pursuits of four characters culminate in marriage, the young girl saved from the brothel is killed in a riot, and a wealthy Chicago businessman commits suicide because "he had made money his god" (p. 142). Even the faintly plausible, such as a rich slum landlord deciding to clean up his property after a revealing personal visit, is turned into an agonized renunciation:

> From the moment he stepped into that wretched hovel of a home and faced for the first time in his life a despair and suffering such as he had read of but did not know by personal contact, he dated a new life. It would be another long story to tell how, in obedience to his pledge he began to do with his tenement property as he knew Jesus would do. What would Jesus do with tenement property if He owned it in Chicago or any other great city of the world? Any man who can imagine any true answers to this question can easily tell what Clarence Penrose began to do. (p. 170)

Second, the focus in all three of Sheldon's novels examined here is not really on the actual minister-reformer like Emanuel Bayard in *A Singular Life*. Rather than going into the slums to set aright conditions of poverty, Sheldon's clergymen go there mostly as an example for their self-satisfied parishioners. What they do once established there, with the exception of Douglass, is not specified in much detail. What *is* most visible about these ministers is their exhorting the rich to be more sacrificing, the poor to beware of drink and let the spirit of Christ enter and transform them.

The last novel in this group about slum reformers, *The Honorable Peter Stirling* (1894), presents a politician as the hero rather than a clergyman. It is included here because Stirling's slum work is a convincing version of the same kinds of efforts undertaken by clergymen. The author, Paul Leicester Ford, was both a scholarly historian and an historical romancer, who is this work created a phenomenal best-seller that remained on the *Bookman* lists for thirty-six months between 1895 and 1899. Dealing with Stirling's rise from Harvard graduate to slum reformer to Governor of New York, this work first attracted readers when the hero was rumored to be based on President Grover Cleveland. Fresh from law school, Stirling opens his own office but finds little to do except get acquainted with children living in a near-by slum neighborhood. This leisurely pastime leads to a real vocation when he begins investigating the deaths of three youngsters from bad milk. When he finds diseased cows being fed leftover mash from a brewery, Stirling's role as defender of the people is determined. Next he goes about speaking in meeting-halls against other slum evils he sees about him and immediately wins the people's respect.

> "There ain't no fireworks in his stuff,...He don't unfurl the American flag, nor talk about liberty and the constitution. He don't even speak of us as noble freemen. He talks just as if he thought we was in a saloon."[1]

After this early success, Stirling's rise in politics is fairly swift. Only a strike while he is running for governor hampers his rapport with slum dwellers: he is called upon to lead the militia against the dissidents, a role which loses him some friends among militant workers. But after a wild anarchist's bomb alienates everyone, he recovers his

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[1]Paul L. Ford, *The Honorable Peter Stirling* (New York, 1894), p. 132.

prestige. This affair is only a minor disturbance in Stirling's otherwise comfortable relationship with slum residents, as he goes into the saloons and tenements to meet the "low, uneducated people of his district" and attempts to understand and respond to their daily problems. "'That is my way of trying to do good,'" he says,

> "and it is made enjoyable to me by helping men over rough spots, or by preventing political wrong. I have taken the world and humanity as it is, and have done what I could, without stopping to criticize or weep over shortcomings and sins. I admire men who stand for noble impossibilities. But I have given my own life to the doing of small possibilities. I don't say the way is the best. But it is my way, for I am a worker, not a preacher." (p. 408)

In contrast to Sheldon's ministers who usually deal with the poor only by encouraging their own middle-class peers to sacrifice, Stirling takes tangible action to improve their lot. Few of the incidents in *The Honorable Peter Stirling* are presented in as much detail as the bad milk case (which eventually is won in court), but even the abstract statements of what the hero stands for indicate an active participation in the slum that is foreign to many fictional minister-reformers.

Other types of volunteer workers attempting to correct slum poverty appear in works that might be called "settlement house" novels. These depict a wealthy young man or woman giving up a life of ease to join the poor and help them improve their lot. Again, actual events of the day encouraged authors to attempt such writing. Most of these novels were written in the nineties, after the slum had been introduced to readers in *Robert Elsmere* (1888) and in the widely publicized work of Jane Addams at Hull House. In 1892 Addams spoke of the need for giving young people the chance to become active in the real world:

> We have in America a fast-growing number of cultivated young people who have no recognized outlet for their active faculties. They hear

> constantly of the great social maladjustment, but no way is provided for them to change it, and their uselessness hangs about them heavily. Huxley declares that the sense of uselessness is the severest shock which the human system can sustain, and that if persistently sustained, it results in atrophy of function. These young people have had advantages of college, of European travel, and of economic study, but they are sustaining this shock of inaction.[1]

So Addams set about providing a chance for young people to become active in social issues. And the eleven novels to be examined next are a reflection, often frivolous and unrealistic, of this actual movement for social change and understanding between the classes.

Settlement house work was a common theme in the novels of the day, as can be seen even in works not specifically about the slum. Society romances often portray one or more well-bred young characters going off to work in the slums and thus demonstrate the authors' awareness of this social phenomenon. But usually the slum volunteer is not followed too closely in his work and the author emphasizes the more fascinating corruption and dissipation of the well-to-do. In Amelia Barr's *The King's Highway* (1897) the hero is Steve Lloyd, a wealthy young dandy who squanders his father's money on global sprees. Eventually, however, he inherits this wealth and is so humbled to be still included in the family that he takes his six millions and goes into reform and charity work. His father had been callous toward the poor ("'Our poor are mostly Irish, and they like to crowd'"[2]), but the reformed Steve wants to prove that indifference need not be passed on with great wealth. Steve is transformed, but the primary focus of the novel remains, nonetheless, on its wealthy characters and their romances, with no slum residents or slum scenes actually entering the story.

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[1]Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*, p. 120.

[2]Amelia E. Barr, *The King's Highway* (New York, 1897), p. 135.

Among the main settlement house novels, some focus strictly on the charity worker's motives and ambitions and on society's criticism of them. One such work is *An Experiment in Altruism* (1895) by Margaret P. Sherwood, a professor of English at Wellesley. Narrated by a New York social worker, this novel sets forth the different social viewpoints of characters named for their roles in the slums, the Altruist and the Doctor, for example. Lacking actual depiction of the slum, the work's main interest is in the ideas of non-slum residents concerned about urban poverty. The narrator describes, for example, the objectives of her mission, including the place of various clubs for the workers (literary, political, and scientific), art exhibitions, literary lectures, dinner parties, and receptions. In addition to these somewhat superficial undertakings, popular with social workers of the time, many other more practical efforts are also reported: relief groups doling out meager funds to the needy, for example, and others investigating especially unhealthy living conditions and reporting them to authorities.

But not all slum volunteers, the narrator recognizes, are completely altruistic. The suspect motives of certain characters are perceptively dissected:

> Some, whose faces had been made sweet by sorrow, were striving only to find expression for sympathy with human pain. Some, who looked eager, restless, dissatisfied, were trying, I thought, to find in the lives of others the absorbing interest they had missed in their own. A few, I feared, had espoused the cause of the needy for the sake of social distinction. An interest in the poor was one of the really important things, like the cut of one's sleeves, or one's knowledge of Buddha.
>
> I discovered a new species of benevolent woman, unlike the old-fashioned Saint Elizabeth who encouraged pauperism by indiscriminate distribution of loaves. A call that I made on a fellow-Almoner... made me hope that the old Lady Bountiful armed with

> pity will never quite give place to this new Lady Bountiful armed with views.[1]

Such directness is rare among settlement novels, which routinely glorify any thought given at all to the poor by young women of means. This analysis of possible motives lays bare the heartlessness behind an urban fashion: like slumming parties, work among the poor was often more for the entertainment of the so-called worker than for the benefit of the slum dweller. Or it was undertaken with so much philosophical justification that actual suffering was overlooked.

Another look at a slum volunteer's fallibilities is found in I. T. Thurston's *The Big Brother of Sabin Street* (1909), discussed in Chapter Two for its romantic portrayal of Tode Bryan's return to his slum neighborhood to help those still trapped there. In a sub-plot running through most of the book, two genteel cousins, Ted Marston and Marjorie Armstrong, become involved in the hero's slum mission. At first they discuss the idea light-heartedly, Marjorie claiming to know some girls who lived in a settlement and were "'just wild'" about it as "'no end of fun.'"[2] But her progress from this frivolity to a true dedication to work among the poor is not completely smooth.

Unlike most nice young ladies of fiction who give of themselves in slum work, Marjorie is not immediately committed to it. After a dramatic incident in which she rescues a young, sensitive girl from the unbearable work of a laundry, Marjorie finally does decide settlement work is for her; but before that she has often retreated from the mission to her former home, vowing she could not find the strength to continue in the slums. At one point she confesses her unsuitability for the work:

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[1]Margaret P. Sherwood, *An Experiment in Altruism* (New York, 1895), pp. 98-99.

[2]Thurston, *The Big Brother*, p. 47.

> "I suppose you'll think I'm dreadful, but *I do not like* being with people whose clothes smell of beer and cabbage and tobacco--who have grimy hands and broken fingernails. It isn't that I'm not sorry for them--I am--just as sorry as I can be, and I'm willing to give money to help, willing and glad to do that....I've tried to like the work at the Settlement--the other girls seem to like it--but after a week or two of it, I get so that I fairly loathe the sight of the heavy beery men and the women with their cotton laces and draggled skirts, and the unspeakable children. I do loathe the whole atmosphere." (pp. 158-159)

Few upper-class charity workers express such vehement revulsion at the poverty they confront. Most are shocked or mildly amused, but in all the novels remaining to be discussed, no heroine is as honestly sickened as Marjorie Armstrong. Indeed, the period of adjustment for most volunteers is swift, and satisfying returns on their sacrifices come quickly.

Another Wellesley professor of English, Vida D. Scudder, also wrote a slum novel examining the motives of a settlement worker and giving hypothetical challenges to them. In *A Listener in Babel* (1903) she uses insights gained in organizing a New York settlement and presents her heroine, Hilda Lathrop, as a sounding-board for various social viewpoints. Even before Hilda leaves for her new mission home, her mother objects to what the girl is doing and presents one of the common arguments leveled against slum work:

> "He who would be loyal to Christianity must be loyal to the dying tradition of social order and stability. I see you preparing to throw in your lot with the forces of disorder, materialism, and unrest. For your own soul's health, I bid you pause. The interior life is the only reality. To live in the spirit today, one must withdraw from the push and roar and false theories of modern life: one must listen to the voices that speak in silence."[1]

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[1]Scudder, *A Listener in Babel*, p. 42.

Like the conservative Reverend Hartwell discussed earlier, Mrs. Lathrop feels only traditional religious belief can ultimately deal with social disorders; but as usual when this position is put forth, the author suggests it only as an example of outmoded thought that hinders real progress in dealing with the slums.

Hilda is also challenged by other characters. When she visits her college alma mater, different professors bombard her with formulary, predictable reactions to slum work. A professor of biology, for example, is opposed to it on the grounds the individual should simply perform his organic functions in society and let others do the same; the teacher of philosophy urges Hilda to be moderate, avoid overt contacts with the mundane world, and concentrate instead on the more important realm of ideas.

But more solid objections to volunteers working in the slum are given by a kindly labor leader, O'Hagen, who understands the large, natural gap between the ideas and lifestyles of the rich charity worker and those of the poor slum citizen. He warns Hilda that the wealthy are ill-prepared to help the poor and that their wealth most often inhibits them from making an important contribution:

> "It ain't no use, Miss Lathrop; you can't understand us; you might just as well let the poor alone. The working people has got to work out their own salvation. No one that hasn't shared their struggle can help them. Life's dainty to you rich. You live in your pretty rooms and think your pretty thoughts, and you go to your pretty churches and hear pretty sentiments about brotherhood,--much the rich know about their brothers!" (p. 178)

This passage is as forceful a statement on the difficulties of slum work as the depiction of Marjorie Armstrong's hesitation in *The Big Brother of Sabin Street*. Both novels suggest working in the slums to be something other than a noble sacrifice a young lady could undertake while keeping

her hands spotlessly clean. And though the passage above is still more rhetoric than moving depiction of reality, it at least seems a more accurate assessment of slum problems than the ideas of many characters who combine myth and prejudice about the poor.

Most other settlement novels depict aiding the poor as easy and gratifying and do not dwell on the volunteers' motives or possible objections to them. In *Stephen Lyle, Gentleman and Philanthropist* (1891) by Mrs. Belle V. Chisholm, the hero is a Harvard graduate and tenement-house owner who gets to know and understand some of his tenants. The romantic picture of Lyle becoming concerned about the lot of those living in his buildings is accentuated by the description of the miserable plight of one family, the Trents, battling poverty and alcoholism. They are the special target of Lyle's zealous charity. And their worthiness is demonstrated by their stalwart modesty and self-respect: when Lyle offers to move them into a roomy cottage, they decline and say their humble tenement home is more suited to their position.

Lyle's charity is sincere enough, and the efforts of the poor to help themselves are convincing too, but most of the novel's plot destroys the simple effect of a businessman responding to his conscience. The alcoholism of the Trents is especially dramatic in the son Royal's fight with temptation as he carries the family's hopes for success with him to college. Despite promises and good intentions, he succumbs to the craving for drink and must face a long reformation. And this melodramatic part of the novel concludes only when Royal is caught in a howling blizzard and pledges to devote a renewed life to Jesus should he survive. Such sidelights into life in the tenements do nothing further to explain Lyle's methods of managing his property according to the golden rule. But they are consistent with most of the book's grandiose action, including

Lyle's cheerful rebuilding of a pottery factory he owns (and adding a home for three hundred girls who work there), after strikers burn it to the ground. In an ecstatically happy ending, the male Trents are cured of their alcoholism and Royal marries a society girl and becomes a minister. Lyle sets up a mission church to help other slum residents substitute spiritual help for the yearning for drink, and he can look forward to even more gloriously successful triumphs over alcohol and poverty in the future.

Another portrayal of a young man-about-town's philanthropy is Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen's *Social Strugglers* (1893), noted in Chapter Two for its lengthy slumming-party. The Norwegian-born Boyesen came to America in 1869 at the age of twenty-one and pursued a career that included editing a Norwegian newspaper, teaching Germanic languages at Cornell and Columbia, writing boys' stories, penning novels of life in his native land, and participating in literary realism as a critic and friend of Howells. *Social Strugglers*, dedicated to Howells, represents yet another aspect of Boyesen, as it looks into American class differences through a socially conscious young man of wealth, Philip Warburton. But before this hero emerges, the novel, like *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, focuses on a newly rich capitalist, Peleg Bulkley, and his efforts to introduce his wife and three daughters to New York society. Bulkley has made his fortune in the West and moved east to see what his money will buy in New York. Eventually one of his daughters, Maud, becomes acquainted with Warburton, a cultured gentleman. And from this point on Boyesen begins to criticize the Bulkleys' frivolous concerns by contrasting them with Warburton's dedication to social causes. This objective becomes clear soon after Maud and Warburton meet, when the girl is shocked that a man of such refinement would have any social consciousness at all:

> She knew that some terribly disreputable, shaggy, and wild-faced foreigners came here from Europe and proposed to turn our admirable civilization upside down; but that a gentleman of Warburton's culture and social standing could sympathize with such criminals had never occurred to her as a remote possibility.[1]

But Warburton does sympathize with the poor and even founds a slum mission. He is, in short, "too strong, too considerable a man, to find satisfaction in the petty conquests and small triumphs of society" (p. 273).

Boyesen presents his opinion of the trivial pursuits of high society in Warburton's talks with Maud on the rich and the poor. This hero is an attractive, persuasive spokesman for the importance of a social consciousness among the wealthy, and his impassioned monologues, delivered usually to an incredulous Maud, are many.

> "Did it never strike you that we are here to fight, not to dawdle away our time in pleasant frivolities and interchange of vapid civilities? Here in Atterbury you would be justified in believing that the world is a charming place, where no serious problems exist, where everybody is moderately good, prosperous, and happy; where fine manners, uprightness in conduct, and admirable restraint of all coarser impulses and desires are not the exception, but the rule. A silent agreement seems to exist to render all the harsh and difficult things of life as smooth and graceful as possible....A man, to be alive, must be in touch with life; and here people are too well bred to mention anything which is stern or unpleasant. It jars upon their refined tastes. Scarcely an echo reaches them of the great discordant, tumultuous life, with its passions and cries of distress." (p. 84)

Maud continues to object hypothetically to Warburton's attacks on society, but her protests lose strength as she becomes convinced that his ideas are admirable rather than just surprising. Finally, with the engagement of the two, Boyesen sanctifies Warburton's renegade ideas and makes society seem capable of change at the same time.

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[1]Boyesen, *Social Strugglers*, p. 81.

Much settlement house fiction discusses such attitudes of the rich toward slum problems by showing well-to-do characters aiding the poor. In *Number 49 Tinkham Street* (1895) by C. Emma Cheney, a novel that borders on juvenile fare, a wealthy youngster named Robert Trumbull becomes acquainted with a poor Italian lad, Mike Caputo, and through him learns about the plight of slum children. The genteel Trumbull family is fearful that Mike will corrupt Robert, and the maid, Hannah, warns about disrespect for class lines:

> "Them ain't the sort o' folks that Robert Trumbull's kin is used ter goin' with....It's the gospel truth, an' I'm goin' ter clear my conscience by tellin' on't. I know where the trouble is. I guess I ain't blind.... Folks go 'round now-a-days a-palaverin' over gypsies an' vagabones, 'cos it's the style, 'thout cakalatin' the cost. I never!"[1]

The two boys become fast friends anyway, for Robert is the only one who understands Mike's true worth. But not until the end of the novel is the slum lad proven to be upright. After he is accused of stealing money from his boys' club, it turns out he has borrowed it to buy a wedding present for Hannah, who is about to marry a sea captain.

The book's main action is Robert's organizing of boys' homes for slum unfortunates. By the conclusion all the Trumbulls have joined in the effort, the mother dedicating the house of the title and everyone pitching in to offer instruction in skills like carpentry and painting. In short, Robert's efforts to convince his household that Mike needs help rather than scolding are as great a success as Warburton's pronouncements to Maud Bulkley that the lives of the poor deserve attention. And besides such thorough reversals in characters' thinking, other parts of Cheney's story are maudlin. During the boys' early friendship, Mike

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[1] C. Emma Cheney, *Number 49 Tinkham Street* (Chicago, 1895), p. 64.

keeps Robert company when the latter's leg is amputated. An unspecified injury requires the removal, and a difficult recovery is made easier by Mike cheering up the little patient with happy tunes on his street organ. Robert's survival, in fact, is eventually credited to Mike's gay presence.

This gentle criticism of high society's indifference is common to many of these settlement novels that continually contrast dissipated upper-class characters with their socially concerned peers. *A Plain Woman's Story* (1890) by Julia McNair Wright introduces a young society man, Dolph Lowther, who steals money that his cousin, Joan Hazzard, means to use in her home for orphans. But Joan's wealthy friends collect replacement funds among themselves. And in the end Lowther himself returns, stricken with pneumonia, and promises to reform and eventually pay back the sum he squandered.

Most of the story is about Joan reforming slum characters directly rather than influencing her friends. Wright presents various of her "cases," as Joan reviews the merit of each coming before her, refusing to help those she judges lazy and proud, and taking in the truly destitute who are willing to work. "'Look at your dress!'" she lectures a slovenly woman who has come looking for work,

> "why have you not cleaned it thoroughly, sewed on the buttons and darned, not pinned up, that tear? Does not the Scripture demand that all things should be done decently and in order? Your clothes and skin are not decent nor in order....This bureau is to help working women, but they must begin by helping themselves as far as they can; your first duty here is to be neat and respectable in appearance. Go home and make yourself thoroughly clean and orderly, and then come here and let me know what you want."[1]

Joan's approach to helping the slum poor is to foist genteel habits bred in comfortable surroundings upon those not equipped to understand and

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[1]Julia McNair Wright, *A Plain Woman's Story* (Philadelphia, 1890), p. 37.

incorporate things like routinely scrupulous cleanliness into their lives.

Hard work and strict discipline are the staples of life in Joan's mission. The girls must keep strict hours (in bed by nine-thirty, up at five), must attend worship services regularly, and must have their gentlemen guests undergo inspection by those in charge. All these requirements are presented as sensible hints that cannot help but assure success for every well-meaning girl. And to prove that these guidelines work, Wright shows how the encouragement and advice of Joan Hazzard enable the most disheartened unemployed slum citizen to come out on top. A foundry worker named Ned, for example, is depressed because he can find no work in his trade. At Joan's suggestion he becomes a "street-seller" peddling odds and ends in a sidewalk show, his stock coming from discarded pins, needles, and buttons. He finds himself making a better living at this pursuit than he had in the foundry.

An unusual variation on the theme of the rich imparting aid to slum dwellers is *Mr. Grosvenor's Daughter* (1893) also by Mrs. Wright, a prolific writer of religious fiction since 1867 and an ardent temperance worker. Deborah Grosvenor, a young socialite, struggles to survive as a working girl after her father dies and she finds herself mysteriously penniless. She goes from one poor job to the next, from the "pasting room" of a shoe factory to short sojourns at a paper box plant and the packing-room at a candy factory. Through all of this she keeps up a courageous front, putting up with poor wages (she expects $20 a week at her first job, but takes home only $1.50), dirty conditions, and intolerably strict overseers. At the same time, Deborah moves out of her father's mansion and into small rooms in a slum neighborhood with her uncle and one maid who stick with her through it all.

Despite the harshness of her new life, Deborah always maintains her cheerfulness. She is determined to make amends for what she begins to think was gross over-indulgence in her former life of luxury. Like Warburton in *Social Strugglers*, she is convinced that the easy life is devoid of meaning. "'How would it feel to stand in the bracing air of poverty?'"[1] she wonders as she begins making her way in the world. And once into the working girl's life, she is even more certain that some hard going will do her good:

> "I have already had a glimpse of my working sisters. I shall go down among them to learn how they live and how they suffer. The truth is...I have been a heartless idler all my life;...I am sick to the death of this empty idleness. I never have had any real satisfaction in it, and now I mean to see if there is anything better on the hard-working side of life." (p. 59)

After her initial struggles in the factories, Deborah's luck changes and she is offered a position as forewoman in a shirt-factory. All her efforts in previous jobs to bring about better conditions for the workers came to nought--she was even fired from the candy-packing job for singing a hymn to alleviate the girls' suffering in the factory's heat. But her shirt-factory boss claims he wants to manage things according to Christian principle. From this congenial work it is only a short step for Deborah to opening a settlement house for working girls and a Working Woman's Bureau much like that run by Joan Hazzard. Deborah, however, lays more stress on changing the poor conditions of working people than on reforming them in Joan's manner. She goes into long discussions of ills like poor ventilation and inadequate toilet facilities and proposes longer lunch hours, reading rooms, and a gymnasium to improve the girls' vigor.

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[1] *Mr. Grosvenor's Daughter* (New York, 1893), p. 29.

The long passages revealing Deborah's feelings of guilt for living an indifferent and slothful life of ease are drawn out to the point of detracting from the depiction of her actual achievements for working women. The emphasis continues on the heroine, as in *A Plain Woman's Story*, and not on those slum residents she is living with and aiding. As the success of her philanthropy increases, the lives of workers are put forth less than her own ideas and projections for new settlements. And toward the end, all the novel's intentions of showing the rich helping the poor are undermined completely as Deborah's uncle reveals that she is indeed still a wealthy heiress and that her father had planned the temporary hardship as a survival test for her. Deborah immediately decides to use her recovered wealth to build a mission home for every ward of the city, now that she is thoroughly converted to a life of settlement house work. But with this conclusion the book sinks into the abyss of romance and sentimentality. Not only was her uncle always present to save Deborah with her rightful millions should she fail too disastrously, but the job in the shirt-factory that started her on her philanthropic way was contrived with her father's money.

In short, Mrs. Wright's sincere effort to show sympathy for the poor and demonstrate the good accomplished by the conscientious rich is compromised severely by these unrealistic, melodramatic developments. When love enters the story toward the end, Deborah refuses a marriage proposal because she must dedicate her life to "'a thousand working-girls, my sisters, who call me to aid them!'" (p. 365). But conforming more to a romantic love story than a strong, fictional account of social conditions, Deborah does finally agree to marry a sincere, young charity worker.

Another heiress' slum involvement in a romantically compromised novel is that of Charlotte Coverdale in *The Petrie Estate* (1893) by Helen Dawes Brown, a graduate of Vassar, author, and lecturer. Charlotte inherits her fortune without incident, but the reader learns it rightfully belongs to Richard Waring, a young man who was close to the deceased man. Unaware of this injustice, Charlotte proceeds to devote her new wealth to cleaning up the tenements that came with the inheritance. She plans to lower rents, install housekeepers, and open a personal office in the tenements to deal directly with tenant problems. But when she becomes acquainted with Waring and a romance develops, the irregular acquisition of her funds again becomes the story's main focus.

The portrayal of Charlotte emphasizes this dramatic love interest, for she is not a particularly strong character whose slum work is specified in much detail. Beyond her immediate changes for her tenements and some proposed free baths and laundries for the poor, little is said about her actual work on the property or people she meets there. No attempt is made to describe various cases like those that come before Joan Hazzard in her mission. Instead, Charlotte is seen arguing with those opposed to her tenement activities, like an agent who has managed the property with an iron hand and maintains "'you can't make these people over.'"[1] Her actions to disprove this contention are left unspecified as Brown simply notes Charlotte's warm feeling about the tenement people she has come to know. She shows Waring an assortment of home-made gifts the slum children have given her and assures him her work has been satisfying:

> Charlotte half gleefully, half tenderly produced from a cabinet a pair of vases, various small baskets and boxes of home decoration, and a crocheted hood of a poisonous pink.

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[1]Helen Dawes Brown, *The Petrie Estate* (Boston, 1893), p. 122.

> Charlotte looked at Waring, without comment; and a tear filled her eye. She quickly smiled it away, but the tear had been a confidence, and it placed them on a different footing; else Charlotte could not have said, "Yes, it pays. Sometimes it seems the surest way to be happy." (p. 170)

Finally, when Charlotte learns Waring should have inherited her fortune, the focus shifts almost completely to the romance between the two. Waring turns up a missing will, but since he loves Charlotte and approves of how she is using the money, he decides to let the issue lie. But for added drama, the villainous tenement agent steals the will and attempts to extort money from Charlotte to guarantee his silence. This action finally brings everything out in the open, and Charlotte and Waring are united with no secrets to prevent them from marrying. So, as often happens in novels of slum life, the author's apparently serious intentions of dealing with an actual problem of American life are not enough to prevent intrigue and romantic love from entering the story and dominating the point of view.

Another young lady's unrealistic adventure in slum work is combined with a religious message on social problems in Margaret Blake Robinson's *Souls in Pawn* (1900). The heroine, Katherine Irving, has a courtship with her long-time boy friend, John Pierce, while working in a slum mission. The main object of her efforts is Richard Masterson, a saloon keeper with marital and drinking problems. Katherine emerges as another kindly, charitable lady full of Christian principles and sincere concern for the poor, despite some unsavory slum villains who despise her for her clean living. As one of her mission regulars says,

> "'Tain't dat Miss Irving has made any vows to God to hunt us up, but dat she jest can't help it. She full o' love for us, just like Him."[1]

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[1]Margaret Blake Robinson, *Souls in Pawn* (New York, 1900), p. 141.

The test of Katherine's devotion comes when a slum character disfigures her with acid, when he fears she will reveal his attempted seduction of a young girl at the mission. But she and Pierce are married anyway and go on a tour to preach about the necessity for Christian charity toward the slum poor. And in the end Katherine continues with her mission, finding her greatest success in the conversion of Masterson, who decides to give his life to reform work because of her example. Regardless of her disfigurement, Katherine remains certain that her work is worthwhile.

> "God is my remedy for all the ills that flesh has made itself an heir to, and those Christian men or women do not deserve the name who will not gladly account themselves stewards of Christ and use their wealth in His service. When He comes, the social problems will be solved. We can solve many of them now with prayer." (p. 213)

Most settlement novels are not so overt in offering Christian faith as the best solution for social evil, but in many it does lurk in the background as the assumed, most logical answer. Altruistic involvement is the proposed ideal, even if, as in this novel, abstract statements of religious commitment, love interest, and plot twists take the place of any deep penetration into the slum reality. The slum people here are characterized in the manner of all romantic slum fiction by their quaint language, like that in the assessment of Katherine Irving, and by their strange ways of life. As usual the *idea* of the rich giving of themselves is stressed more than involved, believable examples of their actually doing so.

Finally, one novel on settlement work that succeeds splendidly in depicting a convincing, complex relationship between rich and poor is *Differences* (1899) by Chicago author Hervey White. This is the story of Genevieve Radcliffe, a society girl who leaves wealth and ease behind to work in the slums. Her motivation is routine: she feels the upper-

classes have ignored the troubles of ghetto residents too long. But this novel departs from the usual pattern by introducing more real difficulties than most in the heroine's endeavors and, further, by having her become involved with a worker and finally marry him. No other settlement novel ever comes close to showing a young lady's attachment to the poor becoming serious or intense enough that marriage could be an outcome.

The novel opens with Genevieve rushing into slum work with unbounded energy and glorious ideals. Soon, however, she settles down to the hard routine of finding jobs for unemployed slum citizens, a real aspect of social work few of these novels dwell on. Securing decent employment for desperate slum workers becomes "the one question that kept the young girl awake and thinking long into the night." Even when she does place a man, all is not automatically well:

> Perhaps the man whose supplicant and helper she had been failed either through incompetency or a lack of desire to do well. Or perhaps she would hear of how some capable man had been turned away because her incapable applicant had been taken. Perhaps the other man, the competent one, had been watching this opening for months, only to see at length that, because another less worthy than himself had secured a girl's social influence, he was crowded out....She came to feel so girlishly weak in the great economic struggle around her that it seemed as if, wherever she put her meddling hand, she compassed only unjustice and wrong.[1]

White recognizes some real difficulties for the slum worker, poor wages and unemployment. And most important, he shows the participation of a philanthropic person of wealth as a distinctly mixed blessing. In this novel good feelings and moral admonition do not solve slum problems as smoothly as in much settlement fiction. The volunteer must work at them laboriously and can often fail.

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[1]Hervey White, *Differences* (Boston, 1899), pp. 44-45.

When Genevieve lends her support to one man's efforts to find work, her trials only increase. She immediately sympathizes with John Wade, gives him personal funds to tide him over, and soon finds him work at an electric company. Her interest continuing, she further helps this widower by taking care of his children while he works and making new clothing for them. Her relationship to Wade, however, quickly helps Genevieve realize the futility of much of her work. Though thoroughly appreciative of her giving, he frankly warns her about the inherent barriers between the two that will always prevent complete satisfaction in her achievements with him. He points out that while his life is a "case" and an open book to her, he knows nothing at all of her background.

> "You don't tell me anything about yourself. It is not proper that you should tell me. I don't know anything about your affairs, your childhood, or your folks, or anything. I haven't any right to know, because your world is superior. You talk to me of principles, but not of persons. You say things that are like philosophy in books, but I talk only of myself and those I know. You understand all my world, and keep your own to your class. My world is only an incident to you. You look into it, and it furnishes amusement....your world includes ours as a part; and that's the reason it's superior." (p. 116)

These accusations are truer of most of the other heroines discussed so far in this chapter than they are of Genevieve, even though at this point she is still unsure whether Wade may not be correct.

As time goes on, Genevieve becomes more personally involved with Wade and his children, eventually feeling closer to them than to those in her own class. She even breaks her engagement to a young man of society and decides to earn her own living in a factory rather than live off her family's wealth. And when Wade's four-year-old daughter dies, she is drawn even closer to this struggling family. Finally, after much agonizing, she decides to leave her former life altogether and marry Wade.

She vigorously defies her family's objections, but only later as she reflects on her decision does she begin to see its seriousness. The reality of a completely new life is not without its fears and uncertainties:

> There were many checks and falterings, many qualms of fear and of shame. To become a workingman's wife, to grow intimate with what she had always looked upon as coarseness,--it seemed impossible to her;... She watched working people now with a strange and frightened fascination...."I am to become one of these people," she would say to herself; and it required a strong will to walk fearlessly among them. The filth of their work, the smell of their grease and tobacco, sometimes the coarseness of their language that was but half modified in deference to the lady,--"These are brothers," she would say: "these men are John Wade's friends and companions." (p. 293)

The one weakness in an otherwise forceful depiction of the true slum reality is an exaggeration of the ease with which Genevieve makes her sacrifice. After initial fears like those above, she gives up family and fortune with ease and becomes a teacher at $45 a month. At the same time, Wade miraculously gets a job as foreman after having been unemployed for a number of months. But these parts of the story can be seen as concessions to the predominant, popular literary formulas and stereotypes, rather than severely damaging flaws. Despite the incredible working out of the story, the convincing earlier portions remain and leave the work considerably more moving and real than most slum fiction. Not only does White admit the blatant class differences of his day, but he suggests in detail the extremely intricate feelings involved in the association of one class with another. These complex affairs are seen for what they actually are, rather than as problems that can be defeated easily with simple good will. Charity and honest dedication, White says, must be accompanied by the ability to cope with temporary failures and a willingness to do daily battle with the perpetual frustrations related to the realities of slum life.

Other novels in these years offered possible solutions to slum problems through the struggles of labor leaders. The eight such works to be discussed here are more overtly economic than settlement novels and use slum residents for heroes rather than middle-class volunteers. Possibly because of this closer, more exclusive concentration on the slum, novels of labor strife were not as popular as settlement house fiction. No matter how mild their ideas for reform or how black their anarchist foes, labor leaders never attracted as many readers as charity workers. Among the novels to be discussed next, only one, *By Bread Alone* by I. K. Friedman, was a brief best-seller.

But regardless of their insignificant popularity, novels with labor leader heroes employed the same romantic, compromised point of view as most slum fiction that strove for large sales. Besides recognizing the real hardships of slum life and suggesting possible remedies, most of these works were packed with involved love interest, intrigue, and adventure, all of which greatly diminished the force and credibility of their testimony. Even their solutions for the trials of workingmen are not exceptionally strong. As Philip Foner notes, they are

> characterized by sympathy for labor and the underprivileged, but chiefly in the spirit of Christian principles of brotherhood, proclaiming as its message that if only labor and capital could be persuaded to follow the teachings of Christ, all social and economic problems could be solved. Most of these writers were convinced that injustices existed in our economic system, and against these injustices they protested, but they had no wish to change the system itself; or if they did, through idealistic, utopian schemes. For the most part, too, these writers were not workers themselves writing of their own experiences. They wrote about the working class as interested but objective observers, hoping as humanitarians to improve the living conditions of labor without shaking the economic structure. Frequently they discussed trade unions and strikes, but only to prove that force of any kind brought disaster

> upon the workers. Most of this writing ended with a sentimental plea to soften the hearts of the capitalists and infuse them with a belated spirit of brotherly love.[1]

Though most works on the slum laborer feature such moderate positions, the first three to be treated here attempt to give sympathetic attention to more extremist, radical positions. One such book is Hutchins Hapgood's *An Anarchist Woman* (1909), the fictional biography of a non-conformist, politically radical female around the turn of the century. Practiced at describing the slum in the prose essays of *The Spirit of the Ghetto* (1902) and in work for a number of New York and Chicago newspapers, Hapgood contributes his most developed assessment of the slum in *An Anarchist Woman*. Detailing the life of a woman called only Marie, Hapgood blames much of her rebelliousness on the effects of a childhood in the slums.

> Her earliest memories are connected with the smoky streets of the West Side. The smell of the Stock Yards suggests her youth to her, as the smell of walnuts brings back to the more fortunate country man the rich beauty of a natural childhood. The beatings she received from her parents and the joy of her escape to the street--these are the strongest impressions derived from her tender years. To her the street was paradise; her home, hell. She knew that when she returned to the house she would find a mother half crazy with poverty and unhappiness and a father half crazy with drink; and that, if for no other reason than for diversion and relief, they would beat her.[2]

After this introduction to Marie's background, Hapgood follows his heroine, in a manner reminiscent of Defoe in *Moll Flanders*, from job to job in factories and domestic service. Marie is a healthy young girl who responds with an understandable revulsion to the bleakness of her

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[1]Philip S. Foner, ed., *Jack London, American Rebel* (New York, 1947), pp. 7-8.

[2]Hutchins Hapgood, *An Anarchist Woman* (New York, 1909), pp. 2-3.

environment. But unlike most of the labor leaders in these novels, her defiance develops into an intellectual and sexual anarchy rather than action aimed at bettering the workingman's conditions.

But Marie's sexual rebellion turns out to be as radical as any strike leader's economic program. A chapter called "Adventures in Sex" portrays the heroine's sexual initiation as she reacts to the boredom of her life by spending a night with a strange man she meets on the streets. And later, her life in an anarchist commune and her turning to prostitution from time to time are described with an openness rare in any American fiction during these years. But Hapgood attempts to protect himself from strait-laced objections to his subject matter by claiming that his "plain tale" is sometimes a bit rough because he wants to illustrate "certain social conditions and certain social considerations and individual truths" (p. 112). And indeed, nothing in his treatment of Marie's experiments in communal sex among intellectual rebels or of her prostitution is the least lurid. Rather, these incidents are simply part of his sympathetic reaction to her brutal, slum upbringing. Given her restless personality and the poverty of her home life, Marie's rebellious behavior seems easily possible.

But never does she actually get involved with labor movements taking tangible steps to aid oppressed workers. Instead, she joins a group of bohemian outcasts (a "Rogues' Gallery" Hapgood calls it) that is content to revolt against its society through unconventional morals and abstract, philosophical anarchy, rather than any overt action. Hapgood describes these people with the same objective, skeptical tone he uses in presenting Marie's prostitution, saying they

> sat and smoked their cigarettes, drank their beer, kissed their girls, and talked of philosophy and literature and social evil and possible regeneration. (p. 182)

But he nevertheless feels close enough to his heroine finally to save her: disillusioned with her unsatisfying bohemian life, Marie moves to rural California and finds happiness.

> She is in better health, and I think now is in close enough touch with nature not to want to go back for nourishment to ideas and the slum. (p. 307)

An idealized country life that so often lurks in the background of slum novels comes to the fore to rescue Marie.

A novel dealing with radical action rather than philosophy is John Ames Mitchell's *The Silent War* (1906). Founder of the original *Life* magazine, Mitchell was a flamboyant figure of his day, who used his publication for everything from political cartoons, to editorials against medicine, to promoting a "Fresh Air Fund" for slum children. *The Silent War* focuses on his dislike of the idle rich by presenting a revolutionary group called the "People's League" which extorts large sums of money from millionaires and threatens assassination should they refuse. These funds are to be distributed among the poor to help ameliorate their poverty and thus prevent a bloody revolution. The book lacks details of the oppression the rich men cause, but centers instead on lengthy, verbose confrontations between members of the League and certain millionaires. This passage, in which a revolutionary berates a man of wealth for his callousness, is typical:

> "You hold the widow and the orphan by the throat. You capture the savings of the poorest worker. And on what a scale! Never was there record of such unholy fortunes. Blind drunk with it--and still thirsty! So secure in your ownership of men and laws that you sneer at danger....But the uprising is here--at your own homes--inside your doors....

> "When a man works ten hours a day to lay up something for his family, it doesn't soothe him to know that his savings, if not stolen, are manipulated by his enemies to their own swinish enrichment....We may as well be frank. Enemies you are, not friends. Friends would not gorge themselves with the hard earnings of the poor."[1]

And other outbursts too are used to stir consciences:

> "You reap without sowing. Instead of helping the poor man, you not only swindle him whenever you get a chance, but you do it openly and with no shame. You have cornered everything he eats, drinks, wears and uses and you would corner the air he breathes if you only knew how. There has been no finer example, since the world began, of quenchless greed....Other plutocracies have had standards of some kind. You are merely a herd of gamblers. You have lots of fun with the law. You are buying legislators every day--this franchise, for instance," and he raised a package of papers from the table. "And before the month is ended you will be at it again." (pp. 58-59)

But eventually all of Mitchell's concern for the poor and denunciation of the rich are completely compromised for the sake of a happy ending. As the People's League is about to pass sentence on the leader of the millionaires, one of the members recognizes him as the man who gave desperately needed funds to his daughter and him many years ago. This past act of charity saves the man from assassination even though he refuses to contribute the ransom demanded by the League. So Mitchell's point that those of great wealth should be aware of their responsibilities to those trapped in poverty is finally diluted beyond recognition in a conclusion implying that a bit of charity and humane thoughtfulness can save the rich from the coming revolution. The radical point of view is less convincing than in *An Anarchist Woman*: whereas Hapgood's book loses power because Marie's confrontation with slum evils is mostly

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[1]John Ames Mitchell, *The Silent War* (1906; rpt. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 1968), p. 130.

theoretical, *The Silent War* combines this over-reliance on propaganda with the further weakness of an inconsistent and sentimental ending.

The most thoroughly radical novel of this era was *The Bomb* (1909), written by the one-time editor of the *Saturday Review*, Frank Harris. This fictional account of the men and women involved in the Haymarket bombing of 1886 begins by looking at immigrants' difficulties in obtaining work during these years. The man who is eventually to throw the bomb, Rudolph Schnaubelt, is seen struggling through a winter of unemployment:

> I had youth on my side, and pride, and no vices which cost money, or I should have gone under in that bitter purgatory. More than once I walked the streets all night long, stupefied, dazed with cold and hunger; more than once the charity of some woman or workman called me back to life and hope. It is only the poor who really help the poor. I have been down in the depths, and have brought back scarcely anything more certain than that. One does not learn much in hell, except hate, and the out-of-work foreigner in New York is in the worst hell known to man.[1]

Even the jobs he finally does get are hellish: work on the foundations of the Brooklyn Bridge, for example, is perilous for all the men and fatal for some, but the bosses remain unconcerned with safety.

Soon Schnaubelt is attracted to the anarchy of another immigrant, Louis Lingg. This man and his mistress are convinced that violence is the only method that will achieve such ends as a minimum wage, an eight-hour day, and more government control of big business and industry. And in depicting the planning and execution of these revolutionary deeds, culminating in the throwing of the Haymarket bomb by Schnaubelt, Harris never flinches from an honest and sympathetic point of view. Schnaubelt gets romantically involved with a conservative secretary who would be unlikely to share his anarchical fervor, and despite his love for the

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[1]Frank Harris, *The Bomb* (1909; rpt. Chicago, 1963), p. 22.

girl, never allows anything permanent to develop between them. He knows his dedication to "the cause" must be undivided, so rather than risk hurting her, he retreats to England after the bombing, where he lives a quiet, lonely life of exile. Back in Chicago, Lingg commits suicide just before he is to be hanged with seven innocent foreigners for the Haymarket violence that killed eight policemen.

Based on fact and unrelenting in its sober look at the plight of the foreign worker, this novel is one of the most accurate reflections of the true perniciousness of the American slum around 1900, especially as it affected the immigrant. Harris often goes out of his way to explain the seriousness of his subject, a habit that weakens the style of his fiction, but adds immensely to his overall point. Through his narrator, Schnaubelt, he repeatedly points out the economic troubles of the slum and shows how they could logically lead to a total workers' revolt:

> You see the position: on this side intolerant, greedy Americans, satisfied with their steal-as-you-can or competitive swindling society; on the other side bands of foreign workmen with ideas of justice, right and fair play in their heads, and little or nothing in their bellies. These poor foreigners were systematically overworked, and underpaid; they had no compensation for injuries incurred in their work; they were liable for the most part to be discharged at a moment's notice,... What, then will be the outcome? (pp. 190-191)

Avoiding the overly philosophical and ethical issues of *An Anarchist Woman* and the false dramatics and sentimental conclusion of *The Silent War*, this novel states the case of the foreign worker in its most negative light and shows the development of an extremely drastic, but still understandable solution. The ultimate result of the inequalities perpetuated by a *laissez faire* economy are seen in harsher outline than in any other novel in this study.

The five labor works remaining to be discussed give various reactions to more middle-of-the-road leaders and their programs for the slum's economic ills. These works were more numerous than the extremist novels, possibly because the latter were concerned with a less characteristic aspect of the history of the slum: despite popular hysteria since the seventies about the threat of black-cloaked anarchists, milder socialistic reformers were much more prevalent and visible. These novels reflect facts of workers' existence (poor working conditions, unsanitary housing, inadequate food) that a plethora of crusaders were confronting, not the more atypical last resorts like the Haymarket bombing or the Pullman strike in 1894.

The milder, less radical reformers are glorified in these novels, and anarchists and others advocating violence to remedy slum problems are often condemned. In *Joan of the Alley* (1904) by Boston journalist Frederick O. Bartlett, a number of evil characters are pitted against the flower-in-the-mud innocence of Joan Sullivan. A mill-worker with an ill mother to care for, Joan soon begins to ask such questions as these:

> What did it mean that in a great world so large as this, with,...miles and miles of open space to spare, with plenty of that blue sky and of those flowers which Jeanne d'Arc had loved, she should be shut up here in one dark corner? What did it mean when she worked all day beside a great machine which wove yards and yards of beautiful cloth that she, in the end, had none of it?[1]

The various dubious characters who capitalize on this dissatisfaction and try to sway Joan into more militant reactions to the factory system

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[1]Frederick Orin Bartlett, *Joan of the Alley* (Boston, 1904), p. 72.

include her brother, Spike, a ruffian who frequents beer gardens; Mohan, a petty politician and secret owner of the mill, who falls in love with Joan and thwarts her attempts to lead the female workers in a strike; and worst of all, Joseph Gargan, a man who became a Socialist, the author says, after he had failed in all other pursuits.

Gargan too is in love with Joan, but in the end she escapes her more distasteful lovers and is united with Denny Ryan, an honest young freight-handler who will have nothing to do with strikes of any sort. In the process of this conclusion, in which Joan's idealistic efforts to organize the women workers come to nought, Bartlett expresses some solid, conservative opposition to labor agitation of all kinds. Despite sympathy for Joan's naivety and unsullied idealism, the story ultimately depicts her as a dreamy, child-like heroine, motivated by love for her mother, a yearning to help her fellow workers achieve higher pay and an eight-hour day, and a vague notion of the ideal of Joan of Arc. Misled by both capitalist and Socialist, who totally distort her honest efforts to help the mill workers improve their conditions, and largely scoffed at by both her good-for-nothing brother and her stalwart boy friend, Joan emerges as a helpless, pitiful heroine working against impossible obstacles. This book was not an outstanding best-seller, but it is a good reflection of widely popular anti-labor views in its rejection of mild, idealistic reformers as well as more violent types.

But many other authors seemed inclined to sympathize with social reform and to present its proponents' battles with the slum's economic inequities in a favorable light. A novel that does this very successfully is *Joseph Zalmonah* (1893) by Edward King, noted mostly for his writing as a foreign correspondent in the seventies and eighties. In vivid contrast to *Joan of the Alley*, this novel presents a strong, successful

labor leader whose efforts on behalf of his people are openly praised. King immediately creates sympathy for his main characters by describing their disillusionment upon arriving in New York from their native Russia. The disenchantment of Zalmonah's wife, Malcha, was cited in Chapter Two; and similarly harsh beginnings in the New World are later revealed to have been experienced by Joseph. He finally gets a job in a sweatshop, like thousands of Jewish immigrants during these years, and tries to adjust to

> an inexpressible and abominable atmosphere, and crowding in there by day, from long before dawn until ten at night, eight operators on machines, and seven finishers and a presser!
>
> How the spectacle of this horrible life of rending and grinding toil, in which he and all the others were treated like machines, made him groan in spirit! He asked a question of the sweater and learned by the response that he was no longer a man, with an identity, a name, but that he had a number, like a prisoner; that he was "number six." And as he contemplated this picture, it seemed to him that he could feel his fingers tightening around the boss's throat.[1]

After this first insight into the unjust labor system in the Jewish ghetto, Zalmonah quickly sets about leading his co-workers in protests against the sweatshop owner, Freier. One of his first activities illustrates the close connection between the immigrants' poor working conditions and the quality of their slum homes. A crowd led by Zalmonah marches through the streets to investigate the rumored eviction of a hoary matriarch, Mother Levitsky. Her landlord happens also to be a tyrannical sweatshop overseer. As it turns out, the woman was thrown out of her apartment, dies in the street, and is finally borne through the ghetto on the shoulders of mourning workers. This control the

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[1]King, *Joseph Zalmonah*, p. 81.

sweatshop owners have over the workers leads Zalmonah to continue organizing the ghetto residents to strike and to stand up for their rights. In one episode, for example, he sweeps dramatically into a dingy shop and frees a girl being held there for debts fabricated by the overseer. In other instances he distributes funds collected by his new United Hebrew Trade Union to women and children unable to find even a menial sweatshop job.

Finally, in a long-awaited confrontation with Freier, the leader of the "sweaters," Zalmonah voices the workers' demands: a nine-hour day, a full hour for lunch, a Saturday half-holiday in the summer months, an increase in wages, no over-time without pay, and reform or abolition of the sweatshop system. Labor objectives like these were radical in 1893, especially in poorly organized garment industries, but they were not impossible. And to gain further sympathy for Zalmonah and his cause, King puts additional challenges before this leader prior to the final solution. He is subjected to the temptations of a siren, hired by the capitalists, and is even sent to prison on false charges of arson. He is freed in the end only because a violent Socialist confesses to having started the fire, and because, King says, strong popular opinion demanded Zalmonah's release.

Besides the sympathetic portrayal of a labor leader's believable struggles to rectify real slum injustices, the most poignant parts of this novel, as in *The Bomb*, are those presenting the difficulty of the immigrants' ghetto life. Characterization, setting, and background description are actually stronger than the complex plot. In the following scene, for example, King's description of the slum setting is a convincing statement on the wrongs ghetto dwellers endure.

> Some hundreds of "push-carts" like Ben Zion's were ranged within the narrow limits of Hester Street, and were laden with every conceivable kind of merchandise. Behind the carts stood the black brigade of misery, the great unwashed and saucy peddler's company, ready to starve, fight, or suffer tortures in order to turn the nimble penny.
>
> There were no ragged or crippled people in this company of hucksters, and yet they produced upon the spectator the impression of profound poverty. Old women in disordered wigs and tarnished caps, and in petticoats which seemed to have come from the junk man, squeaked out, in cracked voices, the value of their wares.
>
> Cunning-faced boys, already bent and faded like men of fifty, laughed and told jokes, as they dispensed infinitesimal portions of rancid fish and huge pieces of half-baked bread to the pale-faced operatives from some adjacent garret.
>
> At a street corner a shaky and greasy flight of steps led down to a basement in which an old Jew in a green coat sold mouldy-looking meat, while the steps were occupied by a starving book-worm, who had a meagre array of Hebrew literature displayed on a dirty shelf. In a little recess half a dozen old men, leaning on their carts, furiously discussed some knotty point, making the air vibrate with their sonorous jargon. Small slips of girls, barefoot and haggard, went by like rays of moonshine, seeming as noiseless and unreal. They were the messengers dispatched by the toiling employees in adjacent sweating shops to procure them a little food for keeping soul and body in company. There were bands of dirty-faced men who recklessly sold green fruit, all the time shouting at the top of their voices, "Sweet! Oh, sweet!" (pp. 105-106)

This scene is more forceful than almost all of Zalmonah's heroic exploits and noble deeds. Despite the tinge of sentiment in the mention of the dozen men discussing philosophy amid the ghetto grime, this accurate picture of a slum street helps make Zalmonah's somewhat dramatic ventures more credible. And most important for King's cause in 1893, it helps gain readers' compassion for slum workers and the type of moderate, understandable protests in which Zalmonah leads them.

A labor novel less involved and convincing than *Joseph Zalmonah*, but interesting for its reflection of a number of attitudes toward the poor

and the slum workingman, is *Roland Graeme: Knight* (1892) by Agnes M. Machar. A more idealized leader than Zalmonah, Graeme observes overwhelming slum poverty while visiting Europe and upon return to America joins the Knights of Labor to help better workers' conditions. Much of the plot is confused and irrelevant to this study, but Graeme's rhetoric, as well as that of his opponents, lucidly points up the actual problems of the workingman in the slum and the shallow attitudes of those unwilling to recognize that any difficulty exists.

Graeme's tirades against callous capitalists and in support of his laboring cohorts are extensive. Often a well-to-do young lady of the city, Minton, will be put in the role of naive questioner, as is Maud Bulkley in *Social Strugglers*, to give Graeme the opportunity to launch into a speech such as the following:

> "It's positively maddening, sometimes!" said Roland, irrepressibly breaking into the subject that was generally nearest his heart; "especially when one sees the cool, selfish indifference, with which so many people actually shut their eyes to these things; how they even help, so far as they are able, to crush their fellows down and to keep them down!"
>
> "Why, how?--who would do that?" she asked.
>
> "Employers are doing it all the time, and the rich employers are the worst. I suppose that is the reason they *are* rich! But if they did not generally keep their rates of payment down to the minimum they can get men and women to take, there could not be such hard, grinding poverty. The truth is, a large proportion of our laboring classes are always living next door to starvation, and if sickness or want of work comes, it is next door no longer!"[1]

Even though the exclamatory melodrama of this passage calls attention to itself, all of Graeme's concern is based on real enough exploitation of slum workers.

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[1]Agnes Maule Machar, *Roland Graeme: Knight* (Toronto, 1906), pp. 34-35.

Graeme and the Knights propose to achieve a better life for the workers through "cooperation" and "mutual trust" (p. 166). Though a strike against the local mill develops, Graeme reacts with moderate concern rather than overt protest: he spots a fire in the mill, for example, and quickly persuades a number of striking workmen to help extinguish it. Such kindliness encourages the mill owner to end the strike and offer better wages and a Saturday half-holiday. Labor strife and viable solutions emerge as minor considerations in the otherwise smooth operation of an acceptable system. Despite the seriousness of the ills that Graeme repeatedly points out to uninitiated characters, none of them, he claims, is impossible to solve. Brotherhood and cooperation between the employer and his workers can eliminate any disagreement. Workers as well as owners "must more and more learn the value and enter into the spirit of Brotherhood" (p. 167) to protect their rights not only from the encroachment of capital, but just as much, the author implies, from that of militant labor organizations.

Another point of view on labor troubles comes from a conservative minister of Minton, Reverend Chillingworth. In contrast to Reverend Alden, a clergyman who sympathizes with the workers and preaches in support of their rights, Chillingworth refuses to include in his sermons any consideration of contemporary social problems. In fact, his advocation of spiritual reform over tangible protest is only part of his traditional viewpoint that finds any labor-initiated changes repugnant. Chillingworth maintains that reform cannot come quickly or through contrived means such as strikes or protests.

> "There are many directions in which reform is needed. The poverty about us is but one, and reform cannot come by any sudden or artificial means; the only cure for this as for all evils, is the radical cure

> from within--the spirit of Christ acting on individual hearts. Much of the poverty, also, arises from the faults of the poor themselves. Many of them would be miserable in any case. And, you know, even our divine Master said, 'The poor ye have always with you.'" (p. 131)

Characters advocating free rein for industry mouth this last line so often that it runs through economic slum fiction like a conservative slogan. If it is not pious, out-of-touch ministers like Chillingworth spouting it, then it is businessmen and factory owners using it as a justification for doing nothing about poverty.

Capitalists express equally insensitive ideas in the next moderate labor novel to be examined, Cleveland Moffett's *A King in Rags* (1907). A journalist and writer of mystery and detective stories, Moffett struck such a sympathetic, popular vein in this novel of capitalists against laborers that it was successfully dramatized in 1908. The conflict is between a young and fervid labor leader, Phillip Ames, and a corrupt businessman, John J. Haggleton, who is revealed in the end to be Phillip's father. These two antagonists eventually meet in a show-down when Haggleton agrees to live in one of his own tenements for six weeks to disprove the laborers' contention that life there is a bitter struggle ("'A tenement is all right if you make the best of it'"[1]). In addition to this exciting clash, the novel is crowded with colorful minor characters: Gentle, a companion and surrogate father to Ames, interested in mild, socialistic reform; Margaret Lawrence, a self-reliant young woman (Ames's bride in the end) whose father was a captain of industry ruined by Haggleton's grasping ways; Joe and Liz Caffrey, products of the tenement, he struggling with drink, she with pregnancy; and Moran, Liz's father,

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[1]Cleveland Moffett, *A King in Rags* (New York, 1907), p. 144.

another sworn enemy of Haggleton because he feels the capitalist is responsible for his wife's death in the tenements and his son becoming a thief. And in addition to the central device of secret parentage, the book is strewn with many similarly fantastic contrivances: attempted seduction, attempted assassination, the eventual reformation of the villain, and the concluding marriage of the hero and heroine.

The actual attention to slum conditions and solutions for them seems rather routine and dull beside the dramatic plots and subplots. Phillip Ames is more of a theoretical reformer like Roland Graeme than an active street-leader of the people like Joseph Zalmonah. He is a soapbox preacher eager to deliver a heartfelt message on the "gospel and creed of fair play" (p. 65). This dedicated moderation is maintained even when Phillip meets and argues with the bombastic, self-confident Haggleton about the disgraceful condition of the latter's tenement properties. He lectures the older man on slum poverty, being careful to address him politely and hoping to convince him to oversee his holdings with more compassion:

> "These men are products of conditions. It's years of bad air in your tenements and of underfeeding at your wages that make them crave drink. It's a childhood wasted in brutalizing labor that has weakened their bodies and dulled their minds. It's a manhood gone in hopeless struggle that has left them broken and disheartened. There are twenty thousand of them in New York, Mr. Haggleton, who have lost their grip, who are bums, wrecks, lodging-house loafers; but don't forget that they are victims of a cruel order which for the vast majority gives poverty as the only reward of toil." (p. 158)

Outbursts like this were not admired in these years, and most readers probably agreed more with Haggleton's side of the argument. But Moffett makes Ames such a well-meaning young man, sensible enough not to advocate anarchy or even socialism, and Haggleton such a crass, obnoxious skinflint

that the former's passionate speeches seem not only logical, but very appealing besides. And enough sympathetic minor characters in the novel are either out of work or on the edge of starvation that all Ames says has ready illustration.

Haggleton, for his part, continually scoffs at Ames's assertions and eagerly comes to live in a tenement for six weeks to see for himself. Much of what he experiences there in routine hardships does shock him perceptibly; but it is to Moffett's credit that he does not allow Haggleton to be instantly or easily converted to a reform viewpoint. One chapter shows him helping a faltering slum bakery set up more efficient production methods and branch out into other neighborhoods. This venture reinforces his already ingrained prejudices, Haggleton in the end gloating that he has successfully applied capitalistic methods to a problem of labor and created an efficient "bakery trust." This little triumph does nothing to tarnish his belief in economic survival of the fittest, and he repeatedly launches into self-satisfied speeches on the benefits of poverty, much as does Reverend Chillingworth in Machar's novel. At one point he glorifies the suffering of the poor, saying their trials are unquestionably beneficial:

> "My boy, you think too much about the weak. Think about the strong. Don't you see that this tenement struggle makes men stronger. You know it does. Would *you* be the man you are if you'd been coddled in luxury, with everything made easy? I tell you half the big fellows in this country owe their success to being born poor. So don't be too hard on poverty. Don't be too sure it's a danger to the city. It may be a blessing....poverty's about the finest school we've got." (pp. 152-153)

In the end, however, Haggleton is finally converted to a position much closer to that of Ames:

> He would use his whole fortune in a great battle for fair play. He could help the *deserving* poor, not the undeserving. (p. 329)

Part of the reason for this change of heart is the revelation of Ames as his son, which softens the capitalist's ire considerably. But most important, the businessman has been won over by Ames's gentle persuasion: he has seen for himself the truth of the reformer's claims and has been moved by the young man's well-mannered, moderate methods. And the conclusion further substantiates Ames's thorough goodness by showing him being wounded while preventing a disgruntled laborer from shooting Haggleton.

Yet another novel presenting a moderate labor leader is *By Bread Alone* (1901) by I. K. Friedman. Dealing more obviously with workers in the slums than his political novel *The Radical* and giving a more authentic picture of slum life than the romantic *Poor People*, *By Bread Alone* tells of Blair Carrhart, a young man of wealth who wants to establish a socialistic "Cooperative Commonwealth" to deal with injustices of capitalism like the slum. This work is somewhat similar to the settlement house novels in which the main character leaves his comfortable middle-class home to undertake charity efforts in the slums. But Carrhart gives up his good life not specifically to help poor people, but just to work with and get to know them in the mills. And as the story progresses, he becomes much more an actual worker than a distributor of charity: he forsakes Evangeline Marvin, his girl friend and a daughter of the mill owner, and moves in with a Polish family, the Brodskis, in their ethnic ghetto. As strikes and lockouts develop at the mill and Carrhart becomes even more involved in the lives of his new peers, Friedman does a good job of depicting the difficulty his hero has in pleasing his friends on both sides. The mill workers feel Carrhart is aligned with the owner,

Marvin, because the young man still sees Evangeline occasionally; and Marvin sees Carrhart as an agitator, making no distinction between him and two anarchists lurking in the background, Sophia Goldstein and La Vette. And indeed, in the end Carrhart fails to maintain his moderate position and still achieve his goals: Marvin finally calls in the militia and scab labor to reopen his mills.

The novel should properly end with the failure of the striking workers and Carrhart's planned reforms. But Friedman was too much of a sentimental storyteller to leave his hero defeated; in the actual conclusion Marvin reacts to the anarchists' last-ditch attempt to blow up the mills, by granting the workers new benefits and suddenly realizing Carrhart is a fine young man. An ending like this seriously detracts from any solid point of view on how the problems of the slum laborer might be met and leaves the improvement of conditions to chance.

Through three-quarters of the novel Friedman's attitude is clear, and it is the same as that in many stories of moderate leaders, including *A King in Rags*, *Roland Graeme*, and *Joseph Zalmonah*: well-mannered, persuasive arguments will end all the workers' struggles. First Friedman sets the stage by describing the workers' hardships in careful, poignant detail:

> they complained bitterly,--the old complaint uttered since the beginning of time by those who have not against those who have. Coal and provisions were outrageously high. The rent charged by the Company was exorbitant and it robbed them unmercifully for indispensable repairs. Things had been villainously misrepresented; they had been imported by the European agents of the Company on the promise of reasonable work and high wages; and now their pay was insufficient to eke out even their miserable existence. Their families were freezing and hungering. How could they live? How were they to see the dread winter through? The work was deadening, exhausting; it was torture to face those arctic winds for twelve

> interminable hours at a stretch. No horse could endure it. The injustice was barbarous. But they didn't wish to find fault with the work; they were willing to moil until their finger-nails were worn even with their flesh and the flesh bled; if only by the harrowing toil of their bleeding hands they were able to fill their children's mouths and their own.[1]

Then he delineates with equal sincerity and care Carrhart's plans for dealing with all these deprivations. Speaking at a Socialist meeting, Carrhart criticizes slum working conditions for "grinding the multitudes to dust," and he goes on to propound an ideal society:

> The new state would begin at the beginning of things; it would take the child to its own schools, and teach the young idea how to shoot towards the nobler aims of the social commonwealth. Civic churches would supplant the dogmatic worship of the creeds. Socialism was to be both education and religion; church and school would help combat the selfish egoistic ideas instilled through the centuries.... Finally, as apex of the pyramid, the crowning stone for which the base was built--the socialization of private industries. (pp. 128-129)

Despite the immediacy and power of their slum-oriented material, most of these novels portraying solutions to slum problems still deal in romantic half-truths, stereotypes, and shallow formulas. Johnston's *Dwellers in Gotham* and Hirsch's *The Cage* present clergymen entangled in conservative viewpoints being suddenly and decisively converted to sincere social concern. Or ministers and social workers are seen too often relying on moral imperatives to the wealthy (as in Charles Sheldon's works) or to the lackadaisical poor (as in Julia M. Wright's *A Plain Woman's Story*). And most of the labor novels present temperate leaders like Roland Graeme or Phillip Ames convincing entrenched, greedy capitalists through rhetoric or reasonable protests that they should change

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[1] I. K. Friedman, *By Bread Alone* (New York, 1901), pp. 92-93.

their ways, recognize their employees as human beings, and arrange their enterprises to suit the laborers' needs as well as their own accumulation of profits. And Mitchell's *The Silent War* and Moffett's *A King in Rags* even put the economic struggle of the slum on the level of exciting stage drama. All these interpretations are weakened further by the highly romantic elements woven into the stories: a love interest for the hero that amost always results in marriage, and stereotyped characterizations of both capitalists and revolutionaries.

But regardless of the weak economic criticism that makes these novels seem all too similar to the romances discussed in the first part of Chapter Two, they are not completely shallow or misconceived by any means. All these novels, including those offering more radical solutions, do give conscientious portrayals of the slum's economic ills. They admit ghetto life is not simple or carefree, and they recognize that changes must occur before the quality of slum life and work will improve. And these recognitions, despite an unwillingness to pursue and develop them completely, are a large step for fiction toward facing the slum as an unavoidable, real fact of American life.

All the novels considered in this chapter, by their very slum settings and characters coping with slum problems, make some contribution to a better understanding of this American malaise between 1890 and 1910. And many of them go beyond these initial facts. Harris in *The Bomb* and King in *Joseph Zalmonah*, for example, create strong, believable pictures of the real troubles of immigrant workers, and offer labor leaders reacting in plausible ways to these intolerable conditions. Likewise, many of the ministers and settlement house volunteers are presented in credible battles in which the odds seem heavily against any victory over

slum suffering or injustice. Emanuel Bayard in Elizabeth S. P. Ward's *A Singular Life* and Peter Stirling in Paul L. Ford's novel are both typical of these more convincing heroes who engage in substantial endeavors rather than contrived, heavily plotted adventure stories. Like Sheldon's Philip Strong, they want to confront particular wrongs head-on.

> "The real work of this church consists in getting out of its own little circle, in which it has been so many years moving, and going in any way most effective to the world's wounded, to bind up the hurt and be a savior to the lost....It means helping to make a cleaner town, the purification of our municipal life, the actual planning and accomplishment of means to relieve physical distress, a thorough understanding of the problem of labor and capital, in brief, church work today in this town is whatever is most needed to be done."[1]

And like Ruth Leigh, a female doctor of the slums in Charles Dudley Warner's *The Golden House*, they persist even without hope of reward:

> Though she was weary of her monotonous work, and heartsick at its small result in such a mass, there never came a day when she could quit it. She made no reputation in her profession by this course; perhaps she awoke little gratitude from those she served, and certainly had not so much of their confidence as the quacks who imposed upon them and took their money; and she was not heartened much by hope of anything better in this world or any other; and as for pay, if there was enough of that to clothe her decently, she apparently did not spend it on herself.[2]

Passages like these help to give authenticity to these figures and their toil, even when their successes do seem to come too easily. Their struggles against tangible, difficult forces in the tenement environment make these stories honest reflections of slum material rather than romantic, whimsical tales.

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[1]Sheldon, *The Crucifixion of Phillip Strong*, p. 155.

[2]Warner, *The Golden House*, pp. 129-130.

Despite the efforts of those like Phillips, London, and Crane to deal with the slum in serious, realistic ways, and despite the substantial observations of minor authors like Kauffman, Sinclair, and Cahan, most slum fiction of this period is dominated by a viewpoint that falsifies the reality of tenement life. From Ade's saucy *Artie*, Townsend's happy *A Daughter of the Tenements*, and Mrs. Rice's cheery *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, to Sheldon's didactic *The Crucifixion of Phillip Strong* and Mrs. Wright's contrived *Mr. Grosvenor's Daughter*, these novels are popular interpretations meant to amuse rather than reveal. With exceptions like Cahan's *Yekl*, Sinclair's *The Jungle*, and Kauffman's *House of Bondage*, these works are closer to fanciful escapist best-sellers of the late nineteenth century in plot patterns, characterizations, and story resolutions than they are to investigative reporting and documented non-fiction on the slum phenomenon. Their subject matter notwithstanding, they belong more to the romantic school of popular story-telling than to the emerging world of in-depth journalism. They look at the new and unpleasant reality of slum life in ways that reduce it to fascinating settings for dramatic stories of human struggle.

Regardless of this frivolous use of actual conditions, two ideas advanced by Richard Hofstadter in *The Age of Reform* (1955) help to identify a contribution of such novels to the American attitude toward slum life. The first may offer an explanation for authors' persistent use of characters that are so incongrously superior to their slum surroundings. American cities, Hofstadter notes, were becoming inhabited by hordes of rural migrants with a way of looking at their new urban homes that influenced the entire nation's ideas:

> The whole cast of American thinking in this period was deeply affected by the experience of the rural mind confronted with the phenomena of urban life, its crowding, poverty, crime, corruption, impersonality, and ethnic chaos. To the rural migrant, raised in respectable quietude and the high-toned imperatives of evangelical Protestantism, the city seemed not merely a new social form or way of life but a strange threat to civilization itself.[1]

And if the city was such a threat, the slum in particular was even more fearsome.

As might be expected, many of these novels are stamped with the imprint of this rural mind, despite their slum settings. But instead of rustic timidity determining their actions, rural ideals like cleanliness, optimism, and perseverance motivate these characters in facing the slum. As noted in Chapter Two, others besides Mrs. Wiggs display these characteristics: slum citizens in *Poor People*, *Doctor Rast*, and *The Voice of the Street* are armed with simple, home-spun ethics that help lift them above ghetto strife. Likewise, innocents like Carlotta Di Carlo, Tode Bryan, Cecilia Sweeney, and Carminella Cesarotti make their way through slum foulness by relying on their sincere and ingenuous good natures. None of the slum's multifarious perversions of crime, crowding, or disease can touch their staunch purity. Even the novels about charity workers and labor leaders confronting slum evils are overloaded with uncomplicated heroes who face and defeat the slum's ills with good cheer and hardy determination. Sheldon's ministers and Mrs. Wright's settlement volunteers especially employ old-fashioned admonition to elicit the best behavior from the unconcerned middle-class, as well as recalcitrant slum figures. And these strong, stainless traits also characterize labor leaders like Joan Sullivan, a flower-in-the-mud, and Phillip Ames,

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[1]Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York, 1955), p. 176.

a rugged spokesman for the slum's downtrodden. In short, the leading characters in all the more fanciful slum novels face their surroundings with personalities and beliefs little different from those of fresh arrivals from the country. Their assessments of their conditions and plans for improving them always seem closer to the spirit of the independent, rural landowner than to that of the callous or weary slum resident. Rather than hardened city folk, they are still, in essence, a healthy breed of confident country people, positive that slum trials are manageable.

The appearance in slum characters of all these qualities usually associated with a rural way of life may, however, have served some positive purpose in this period. Although these attitudes seem flimsy and incongruous in the light of the slum reality, Hofstadter's second point presents a possible reason for their general popularity. In discussing sensational "sob-sister" journalism that focused on slums and the poor, he suggests that

> while the manifest function of such writing...may be to exploit sentiment for the sake of sales, its latent function is to help create an urban ethos of solidarity and to put some limits on the barbarization of urban life....A civilization that needs sob-sister journalism is a sad one, but the same civilization incapable of producing it would be worse. (p. 190)

Just as unconsciously arrived at, such too may have been a beneficial result of these improbable accounts of slum life. Except for the more moving works by men like Kauffman, Sinclair, Cahan, and Harris, the novels of slum life offer few genuine pictures of tenement conditions or few elaborate means of dealing with them. Rather, what they do give is a coherent point of view that distorts the slum through idealization and thus blunts its terror. What could be more encouraging than the jaunty

face Artie turns toward the slum, the jubilation with which Mrs. Wiggs handles tenement tragedies, the triumphant piety with which Sheldon's Reverend Maxwell saves slum alcoholics, or the certainty and grace with which Phillip Ames eases economic and social tensions? Even the most far-fetched of these renditions of slum life may have served to calm readers' misgivings about strange new aberrations like the slum and reaffirm the viability of the country's long-cherished ideology of success. Although such functions appear only weakly reassuring today, if these misrepresentations did help Americans feel more at ease with the uncertainties of their day, then they did serve a justifiable purpose.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Selections from the *Bookman* Monthly Sales Lists

The following are works relevant to this dissertation that appeared in the *Bookman*'s compilation of "Sales of Books During the Month." These lists began in January, 1895, cited the six largest selling books in twenty to forty cities, and included title, author, publisher, and price.

Author	Title	Years	No. of Months
Ade, George	*Artie*	'96-7	3
	Pink Marsh	'97	2
Crane, Stephen	*Maggie*	'96	1
Dreiser, Theodore	*Sister Carrie*	'07	4
Ford, Paul L.	*The Honorable Peter Stirling*	'95-9	36
Friedman, Isaac K.	*By Bread Alone*	'02	1
	The Lucky Number	'97	1
	Poor People	'00	2
Glass, Montague	*Potash and Perlmutter*	'10	1
Grant, Robert	*Unleavened Bread*	'00-1	9
Kauffman, Reginald	*The House of Bondage*	'11	7
Lewis, Alfred H.	*The Boss*	'03-4	2
London, Jack	*The Iron Heel*	'08	2
	People of the Abyss	'04	1
Payne, Will	*Jerry the Dreamer*	'96	1
Perry, Bliss	*The Plated City*	'95	1
Rice, Alice H.	*Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*	'01-4	29
Riis, Jacob	*The Battle with the Slum*	'03	1
Sinclair, Upton	*The Jungle*	'06-7	11
Sheldon, Charles M.	*In His Steps*	'98	6
Strong, Josiah	*The Twentieth Century City*	'98	1
Townsend, Edward W.	*Chimmie Fadden*	'95	7
	Daughter of the Tenements	'95	1
	Days Like These	'01	3
Ward, Elizabeth S. P.	*A Singular Life*	'95-8	17
Whitlock, Brand	*The Turn of the Balance*	'07	5
Wright, Harold B.	*That Printer of Udell's*	'03	1