

**THE CASUAL  
LABORER, AND  
OTHER ESSAYS**

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The casual laborer, and other essays by Carleton H. Parker

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## INTRODUCTION

A TREMENDOUS responsibility rests upon anyone who undertakes to publish posthumous writings. Even though they may have been written to appear in print here and there, one cannot be sure that in later years the author would have wished them given to a wider public in more permanent form. Yet the time may come, as I feel it has in this case, when the value in publishing certain manuscripts seems greater than the drawback that possibly their author would have preferred to let them rest in more or less oblivion.

The only real reluctance I feel about publishing the following papers concerns itself with the first manuscript, and one which in many respects is perhaps the most vital paper of all. This article was not written for publication in any form. Back in the winter of 1916, Carl Parker journeyed East on what has been termed his Research Magnificent, to lay his thesis, mulled over until then in comparative solitude in his Berkeley hillside



study, before the big minds of the country in his field.

In New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, his soul exulted in chance after chance for telling discussions and arguments concerning his loved subject, the application of the newer psychology to a study of labor problems. Letter after letter brought back to California accounts of rich conversations with the men he had most hoped to interest in his thesis, and the resultant stimulus and encouragement. Along toward Christmas he felt the time had come when he should put his thesis into writing and thereby receive even more definite criticism from the men whose ideas he valued. This he did, and under date of January 6th, 1917, he wrote: ". . . I redressed my talk down and raced to read it to Professor Hollingworth. We spent four hours on it and I had numerous criticisms and hints. None adverse to the thesis, only suggestions as to places where I might strengthen it. . . . I read my paper to Walter Lippmann tomorrow and then Monday I'll be ready to type it and get carbons to send you. All tomorrow morning I'll labor on getting it into better shape. *Of course it is written in part to call out comments, so the statements are*

*strong and unmodified.* I am sure that I'll see just how it will be developed into a complete book form before I am done with this reading of it. I feel it in my bones. . . ." This paper I have titled: "Toward Understanding Labor Unrest." In a chronological arrangement it would have appeared second. It gives a perspective to Carl Parker's approach to the study of labor problems; it is the most intimate paper of all — it was given first place.

The second paper, "The Casual Laborer," appeared in 1915 in the November *Quarterly Journal of Economics* under the title "The California Casual and His Revolt." From November, 1913, to November, 1914, Carl Parker was Executive Secretary of the California State Immigration and Housing Commission. In the spring of 1914 he was deputized to investigate the Wheatland Hopfield Riot for the Federal Government. As intimated in the first paper, perhaps this was as fruitful an incident, judged from the intellectual viewpoint, as he ever experienced. By its very dramatic quality, it focused his interest, as it focused the interest of the State, on the problem of the migratory, the casual, the I. W. W. From that time on he kept pegging away at the whys

and wherefores, and at the very time of his death was more intent than ever on understanding the lower strata of labor, their troubles and the possible solutions. Somehow the glaring inadequacy of even supposedly intellectual handling of the labor problem ate into his soul from the time of the investigation of that Riot on, and he gave up the rest of his life to digging as far below the surface of labor unrest as he could get.

In January, 1917, he addressed a gathering of Wharton School people in Philadelphia on the subject of the Western Labor Problem, and the Wheatland case in particular. I came across the following notes, the introduction to that talk:

"Any university, or in fact any modern, analysis of the labor problem is composed of a series of formal briefs on temporary instruments which for the moment find themselves used in industrial society, such as conciliation and arbitration, apprenticeship, trade union structure, child labor legislation. University labor treatment is a photographic sub-science. It is like a New Hampshire village church service to a decayed gentlewoman: it is sane and gently daring. It has the pleasant reactions of slumming in a picturesque but not underfed immigrant quarter. Labor, to the undergraduate, is an *interesting* subject.