

**THE WORKERS. AN
EXPERIMENT
IN REALITY**

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The workers. An experiment in reality by Walter A. Wyckoff

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WALTER A. WYCKOFF

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PREFACE

THE preface to a narrative like this must itself be of the nature of a story which will account for the expedition here described, and make clear the point of view from which the experiment was tried.

Enough of the actual setting of the tale is implied in a passing reference to a charming country-seat on Long Island Sound, and the presence there of a fellow-guest, Mr. Channing F. Meek—a chance acquaintance to me then. His wide knowledge of the West, his intimate familiarity with practical affairs, and his catholic sympathy with human nature, made him a man wholly new and interesting to me. And in our talk, which drifted early into channels of social questions, I could but feel increasingly the difference between my slender, book-learned lore and his vital knowledge of men and the principles by which they live and work.

One radiant Sunday morning in midsummer there came to me from his talk so strong a suggestion of the means of acquiring the practical knowledge that I lacked, and in a way that gave promise of an experiment so interesting, and of such high possibility of successful treatment, that in that hour I knew that I was pledged to its undertaking.

No further disclosure of my *animus* is needed than has already been hinted at in the fact of a new, unoccupied, inviting field and the fair prospect which its development offered to a student eager for a place among original investigators. I cannot, however, sufficiently acknowledge my indebtedness to the friends whose generous sympathy has followed me throughout the enterprise—especially that friend already mentioned. To him I owe the first idea of the plan and a large measure of what success has attended its execution.

The narrative form into which I have cast the results of my investigation depends for its value solely upon careful adherence to the truth of actual experience. This account is strictly accurate even to details; apart from confessed changes in the names of the persons introduced,

no element of fiction has intentionally been allowed to intrude.

It only remains to say with reference to my attitude in the experiment itself, that I entered upon it with no theories to establish and no conscious preconceptions to maintain. As sincerely as I could, I wished my mind to be *tabula rasa* to new facts, and sensitive to the impressions of actual experience.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, October 27, 1897.

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THE WORKERS

CHAPTER I

THE ADJUSTMENT

HIGHLAND FALLS, N. Y.,
Monday, July 27, 1891.

THE boss at the work on the old Academic building in West Point gave me a job this morning, and ordered me to come to work to-morrow at seven o'clock. A gang of laborers is fast removing the old building, which is to give place to a new one. From one of the workmen I learned that the men live in Highland Falls, a mile down the river, and so I came here in search of a boarding-house. There was some difficulty in finding quarters, for the place is crowded with workmen attracted here by the new buildings at the Post and work on the railway.

Mrs. Flaherty has taken me in as a boarder. That is not her name, but it sufficiently indicates her. She came to the door with the odor of soap-suds and boiling cabbage strong upon