

ONE TIME "HOBO" PLANS TO HELP NEW YORK CITY'S NEEDY

John A. Kingsbury, Now Commissioner of Charities in New York, Knows What It Is to Sleep on the Soft Side of a Board and that Knowledge Will Help Him Solve Big Problems for the City.

A MAN who has been a hobo, not from choice in order to study sociology at first hand, but from stern necessity, is now Commissioner of Charities of the City of New York. He is John A. Kingsbury, and if Mayor Mitchell had searched the country over he probably could not have made a more ideal selection for that particular job.

For more than 20 years Commissioner Kingsbury has studied the problem of the unemployed, and now that he is in a position to put some of his knowledge to actual use he has planned a number of reforms, some of which he has already started to carry out. The biggest problem that Commissioner Kingsbury has set himself to solve is the giving of employment to the thousands of men out of work in New York City who crowd the municipal lodging house every winter. His plan is to establish a big municipal employment exchange, a clearing house of the unemployed, a central exchange where the man looking for work can be accommodated and where the man looking for the man to work can find the individual he wants without loss of time. In his own words, the plan is to "get the jobless man in touch with the manless job."

Commissioner Kingsbury is 37 years of age. After being buffeted about the west, where he knew many a night how it felt to sleep on the "soft side of a board," as he puts it, and where he served his apprenticeship as a jockey, a blacksmith's helper, and in a dozen other makeshift professions, he came to New York, and in the course of time became the general director of the Society for Improving the Condition of the Poor.

During the recent cold spell in New York, when the municipal lodging house was crowded beyond its capacity, and when the mayor was on the verge of throwing open the armories, the police stations, and Madison Square Garden to the homeless, Commissioner Kingsbury stepped in and cleared up the situation by opening up the big recreation pier at the foot of East Twenty-fourth street. If another period of below zero weather comes along, the city will be prepared not only to feed and lodge the homeless, but to give them all employment. How he accomplished it the commissioner told a reporter last week.

"The first job I tackled when I took office," he said, "was to overhaul the municipal lodging house. You see, my connection with the Society for Improving the Condition of the Poor made me familiar with what had been going on there. Our society dealt with the homeless men and women problem and we kept a social secretary at the lodging house every winter. He kept us advised of the congested condition that obtains there every winter, and made recommendations from time to time and we took action whenever necessary. It was natural, then, that I should have tackled the municipal lodging house situation right at the start.

Crowded to the Limit

"It was well that I did so, for one of the severest cold spells the city ever had came along and public attention was immediately focused upon what the municipal lodging house was doing for the homeless. Every night for nearly a week the place was crowded to its limit and provision had to be made for the overflow. Six city departments in all immediately cooperated. Commissioner Katherine B. Davis of the department of correction, loaned the necessary boats to take care of the overflow; Dock Commissioner Smith placed the recreation pier at the foot of East Twenty-fourth street at our disposal; the police commissioner gave us all the assistance we needed and offered to throw open the station houses; the fire commissioner worked out a scheme for heating the pier, and the street cleaning commissioner evolved a plan to give employment to those able to go to work. There probably never was a time in the history of the city when the homeless were so thoroughly cared for. That was only a temporary arrangement, however, and now I am working out a plan whereby the city will systematically take care of the unemployed.

"I realized that the congested

My Debts

I WROTE a screaming little farce On "Romeo and Juliet"; It brought \$5. That's the sum For which I'm now in Shakespeare's debt.

I did a "Jabberwocky" gag; It went the rounds a month or so. Then fetched \$3.50. That amount I unto Lewis Carroll owe.

From "Danny Deever" I derived Still one more something "on parade"; \$7.50, as per check received. By me to Kipling should be paid.

A cheerful essay a la Lamb, I wrote on "Pessimistic Snarls"; For this, \$10, (more or less), I should remit to genial Charles.

An imitation of "The Bella" I tintinnabulated so. That something like \$7.75 Is due from me to E. A. Poe.

Besides these mentioned, other scribes have on my grateful purse a claim; But till they need it worse than I, 'Til owe it to them just the same!

—Frederick Moxon.

condition of the lodging house was due to two things, the great number of the unemployed who are with us all the time and who are more numerous now than ever before, and the fact that people from all over the country, learning how New York City gives food and lodging to the down and outs, flock here every winter and ask to be taken care of.

"I met with some peculiar incidents regarding this latter class. Many who roam all over the country during the summer come to New York to spend the winter. I know one man who had his fare paid by Buffalo authorities to come here and be taken care of at the lodging house. Other cities are glad to get rid of their homeless by sending them here. Another man I know spends his summer in Oklahoma, but he comes to this city regularly every winter to live at the free lodging house. He gets his board and lodging free, and why shouldn't he come?"

Sleep and Work

"In working out the problem of how to care for this army of the unemployed, I decided that two things were necessary; to provide better shelter and sleeping accommodations, and to provide work for every man who applied. The cold spell gave an excellent opportunity to carry out the reform right away. Under the system, as I found it in operation, people were taken into the lodging house until it was filled, and the overflow was turned adrift. When the regular cots were filled the remainder slept on the floor. First of all I had the Twenty-fourth Street recreation pier put into shape. Deputy Commissioner Wright took that matter in hand, and it was all ready for occupancy three days after the cold spell started. Every person who applied was given shelter, at least. Of course, the boats furnished by Commissioner Davis were also used the very first night.

"The pier alone afforded accommodation for 500 men, and each man was furnished with a cot and a blanket. Formerly they slept on the floor without blankets. I found, stored away on Blackwell's Island, 1000 cots that were used during the street cleaning strike in 1911, and that have been idle ever since. That gave us plenty of cots for all. Then I required every man who applied for shelter to take a bath. For purely sanitary reasons, if nothing else, this was necessary, for the blankets have to be used by others. Every man had to take a bath before going to bed, and some fought hard against it. One man, who was given a shower bath, will probably never come back. Many of the men came in very late, thinking that thereby they would escape taking a



JOHN A. KINGSBURY

back at night. For foremen we selected men who had been at the lodging house several nights in succession. Not one of these men deserted. Of course, we gave all the men their streetcar fare, and only 10 per cent betrayed our confidence and didn't come back. The men were required to do about four hours' work.

"In addition to the 400 thus provided for we found work for about 200 more at the stone yard on Blackwell's Island. The stone yard is a misnomer, for the men work on the roads mostly and do very little stone

breaking. The work, however, was apparently too hard for the men, for on the second day 192 men were sent out and only about 50 per cent reported for work. The work will have to be graduated according to the strength of the men. Commissioner Fetherston believes that a plan can be worked out whereby the men can sweep the streets. Of course we will have to provide for the possibility of the men making way with the brooms. In the course of time I hope to be able to provide suitable employment for all. It doesn't seem quite right to ask a barber or a tailor to lift heavy ashcans. There ought to be some kind of light employment for those physically unfit to do heavy work. If all the men were thus provided for, it would materially lessen the number of applicants. I want the public to realize that we do not intend to make the men do labor that they are not able to do.

"I hope by next winter to have some plan worked out which will meet this situation. In my opinion, the only thing to do is to give these homeless men an opportunity to give something for value received. It saves their self-respect and it protects the city. It is a mistake to throw open the armories and the police stations to these unfortunates, when all they need is employment or a chance to pay with their labor for their bed and board."

Commissioner Kingsbury added that this plan was merely a makeshift to take care of an existing situation. What was urgently needed he said, was some complete and lasting solution of the problem of the unemployed, some such system as

is in use in Germany and other continental cities.

One of Our Big Failures

"The handling of the unemployed is one of the big failures of this country," he went on. "In my judgment the city ought to establish a big clearing house of the unemployed, a sort of employment exchange. I am not sure that it should be an employment office, or only an exchange for the unfortunate out of employment. At such an exchange all employment agencies of all kinds should register daily their lists of

the unemployed. They should be required to give certain information also regarding places they know to be vacant. We should obtain legislation, if necessary, compelling these agencies' private and otherwise, to register at the central exchange the names of all those seeking employment. In this way we would be able to get employment for every one and help out the employer at the same time.

"For instance, in ice-cutting time, the ice companies need a great many men. A central exchange would know just how many men were wanted, and they would be able to furnish them or tell where they could be found. There is always a big demand for waiters at various times, and many a good man out of employment now could be immediately placed if the city knew where the job was. In time it might be even worked out so that all employers could apply direct to the exchange for all classes of workers.

"It would be a solution, in a measure at least, of the servant problem. If all servants were required to register at the central exchange and report whenever they were out of employment they could be brought into contact with other employers. By having all names of the unemployed registered at such a central exchange, it would be easy to strike off duplicates, or the names of those registered at the regular agencies, and at all times the city would know to a person just how many were out of employment and what work each person was best fitted to perform. The same plan is carried out, on a much smaller scale, of course, at the Association of Tuberculosis Clinics. All patients are registered at a central clearing house, and it is very easy to keep track of them all. The Social Service Exchange of the Charity Organization Society also performs similar relief work.

Jobless Man and Manless Job

"There is labor enough for all, or there ought to be, but the great problem is to get the jobless man in touch with the manless job. The great value of such a co-ordination scheme would be the information it would be possible to give regarding the unemployed. It would be like a big laboratory for the study of this situation. Then, there is the question of insurance for the unemployed. It is one of the most hopeful things to look forward to as a solution of the problem. Every able-bodied man ought to be able to work all the time, and when he is working he should be able to put something aside to help him when he is sick. It would be a great thing if we could develop an unemployed insurance in the city, if not in the state or nation. Dr. I. M. Rubinow of the Department of Labor at Washington, an authority on the subject, has advised me that some

each ward daily and find out who the occupant is. A description of the unidentified is then published, and when the police or the family of a missing person requests information, the list is submitted to them. Under this arrangement, the commissioner said, it will be unlikely that there will be another case similar to that of "Big Tim" Sullivan, who remained unidentified in a morgue for weeks.

Because he had a rough time of it when a lad, Commissioner Kingsbury feels that he can bring a sympathetic knowledge to the problems that he is facing. He is of medium height, well built, and wears a mustache and short beard, which cannot hide the kindness of his face. He was born in Kansas in 1876, the son of a railroad civil engineer. His father enlisted in the Civil war from his home near Utica, won a commission, and went west, where he surveyed railroad routes at the close of the war. When he was barely 11 years old, young Kingsbury found himself in the small town of Yakima, Wash., dependent upon his own resources, and he soon became a newsboy and bootblack. He rode Indian ponies, and this brought him in contact with George Needles, the village blacksmith, who owned several horses which he was fond of racing at the country fairs.

On one occasion the blacksmith, who had taken a strong fancy to the boy, had him act as jockey. When the race started, the horse, leaped clear from under the boy, and young Kingsbury decided then and there that he was cut out for other work. The blacksmith still kept his friendship for the lad, and did his best to give him an education at the village schools. The boy earned needed money by running a testing strength machine and superintending a "hit the nigger and you get a cigar" booth, only that Kingsbury was wise enough to substitute for the "nigger head" the effigies of Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison, who were the presidential candidates that year.

Then, to eke out this hit and miss primary education, the boy became telephone operator and night clerk and porter in the Yakima Hotel. From there he drifted to Tacoma and learned the city as a district messenger boy. From there he went to Seattle, and in one way and another, between 1894 and 1897, he got through high school. When he was graduated he went to work in a livery stable. In time he got enough money to try for a public school teachership, and his teacher's certificate came as a matter of course and much energy. His first school was 25 miles back in the Cascade mountains, and after remaining there a year he got a larger country school. The third year he was made teacher and janitor of a large school in the cow country of Washington, where his pupils were cowpunchers, working on their fathers' ranches, except in winter.

The year following he was promoted to principal in the Prosser school in Seattle, where he remained two years, until 1901. In the summer he attended classes in the State Agricultural school and took a correspondence course in law. Then he was elected superintendent of Suburban Schools in Seattle, and was in charge of the schools in Georgetown and Van Asselt. Then came the principalship of the Glendale school, the largest in Seattle, where he supervised 16 teachers and upward of 2000 pupils for two years. In 1906, slender and not strong physically, young Kingsbury decided he needed more education. He was then 30 years of age, and he came to Columbia University and entered classes in its teachers' college and others.

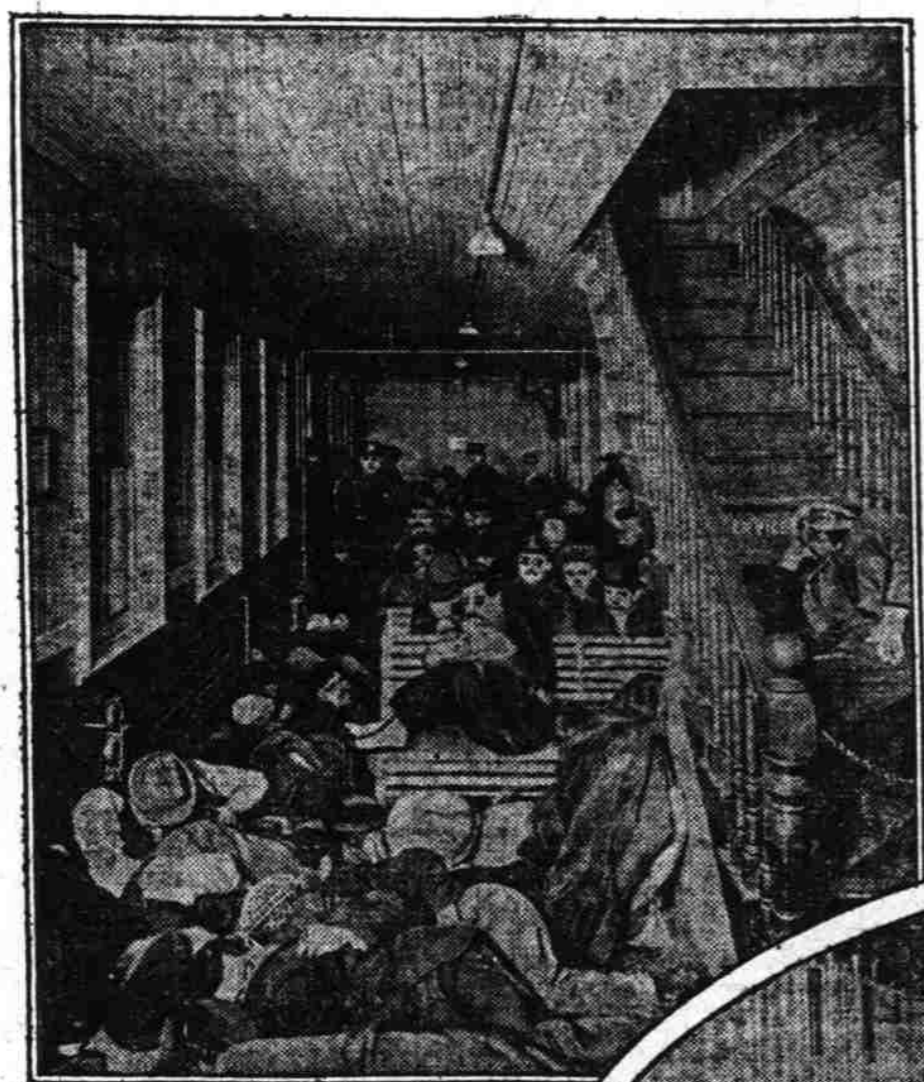
His Start

Homer Folks, who had been Commissioner of Charities, was organizing the work of the New York State Charities Aid Association to carry on the fight against tuberculosis, and in Kingsbury he found the man he needed to assist him. He appointed the young Westerner secretary and put him in charge of the organization work at Utica and nearby camps. From then on Mr. Kingsbury did valuable work in carrying on the fight against the white plague.

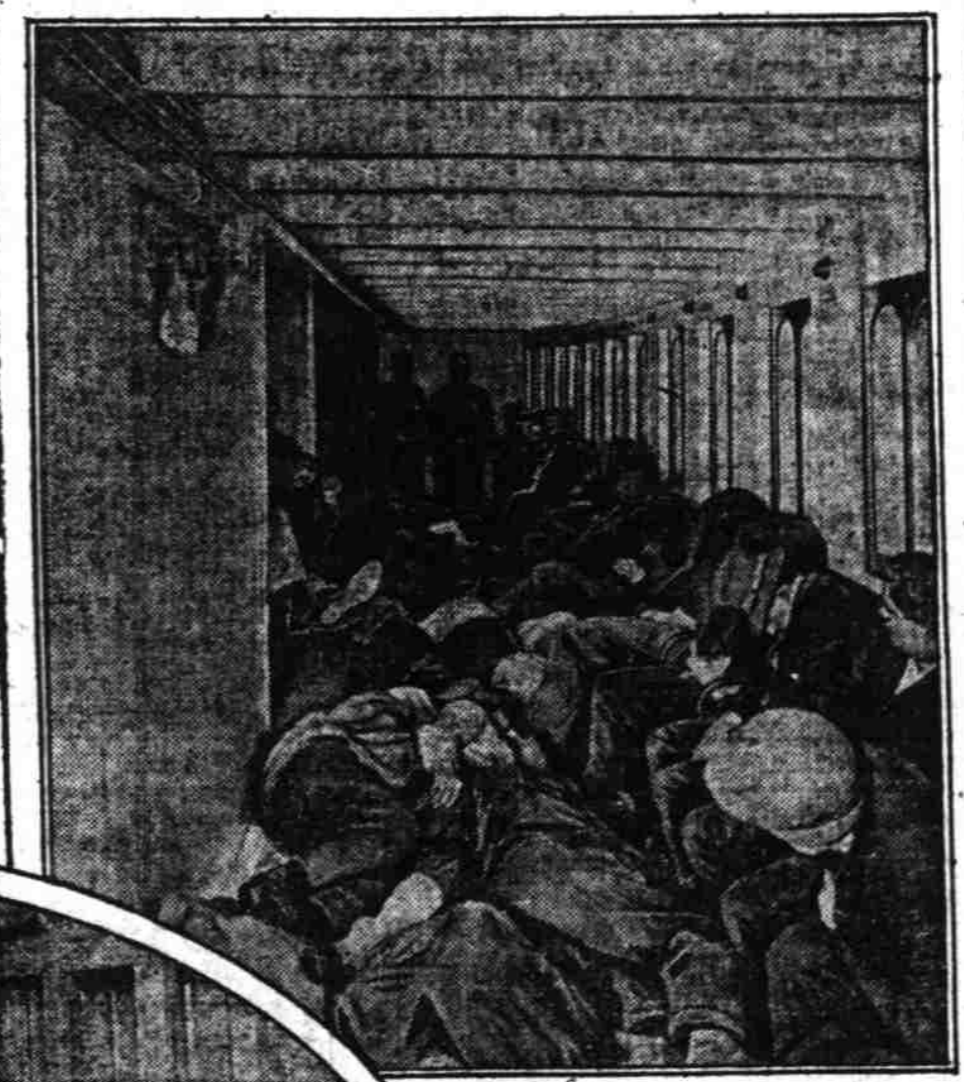
Early in his administration, Governor Sulzer appointed Mr. Kingsbury, Homer Folks, and Dr. Hermann M. Biggs a special health commission, without pay, to study the health laws of the state and remedy conditions. In December, 1910, Mr. Kingsbury succeeded Henry Bruere as general director of the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor. He reorganized the system and methods of the institution and divided the work into two great divisions, family welfare and social welfare. He early joined Col. Roosevelt as a Progressive, but he has never taken a prominent part in politics. In making him Commissioner of Charities, Mayor Mitchell feels that he has the right man for the place.

Aspiration

(To the Daughter of a Musical Household.)
I WOULD not be a freely own.
The trombone by your father blown;
Nor do I long to be the drum.
On which your brother goes tum-tum;
Nether would I that banjo be,
And have your mother pick on me;
And as for envying the flute,
Your frat's teeth—there's nothing to't.
But O to be the violin!
That snuggles underneath your chin!



TAKING CARE OF THE HOMELESS ON A FERRY BOAT



A WEDGE OF WRETCHED HUMANITY



PACKED LIKE SARDINES ON A COLD NIGHT

PHOTO © BY BROWN BRY.

such a plan is feasible. Municipal unemployed insurance, he told me, is being successfully worked out in some European cities.

Commissioner Kingsbury has also worked out another reform since he has been in office. It is a plan to look after the unidentified in hospitals and the morgue. His plan, as he explained it, is to publish a sort of little Who's Who among the unidentified. He has already issued orders to the superintendents of all hospitals under his jurisdiction, and they embrace all except Bellevue and Allied Hospitals, to delegate some responsible person to visit