

CHAPTER II

A DESCENT INTO THE PIT

THE city fathers of the prairie metropolis had, in an ill-inspired mood, removed the board which bore the name Hamlet Street from the crumbling corner of the rope warehouse which tottered above the mud-flats, and had set up another, bearing the inscription Thirteenth Street; but this latter board had been speedily demolished by the conservative vagabonds who made the place their home. This street, running from north to south above the Red River, was made up by some warehouses in varying stages of decrepitude, two hotels of evil repute, and a few wooden houses. It had long been marked down as a safe shelter by the tramps and derelicts who lived from day to day by what they could extort from the charity or fear of law-abiding citizens. These men slept night after night behind the insecure door or under the leaking roof of one of the ill-kept blocks. The police were not frequent visitors in the by-way which had been tacitly allotted to the under-current. Even the tall arc-lights, which swung at either end, were neglected by the man with the climbing irons for weeks together. The lowest orders of life flourished in Hamlet Street, and a few rank weeds pushed determinedly between the rotting boards with which the road was paved.