TRAMPING WITH TRAMPS.

THE AMERICAN TRAMP CONSIDERED GEOGRAPHICALLY.

Some years ago I was sitting one spring afternoon on a railway-tie on "The Dope" when New York Barcas appeared on the scene. There was nothing very peculiar about Barcas, except his map of the United States. Not that he ever set up to be a topographer, or aspired to any rivalry with Johnston, Kiepert, or Zell, but, like the ancients, Barcas had his known and his unknown world, and, like them again, he described the land he knew just as if it was all the world there was. I came to know Barcas's map in this wise:

We were both talking about certain tramp districts in the community, and I noticed that his idea of north, south, east, and west was somewhat different from mine. So, in order that our conversation might not be troubled with petty arguments on geographical boundaries, I asked him to map out the country for me according to his "best light"; and this is how he did it. He took out his pencil and drew a line from the Canadian frontier through Chicago to St. Louis, and another line from the Atlantic through Washington to the same point, and called all the territory north of the last-named boundary the East. He drew still another line from St. Louis to the Pacific coast, and called all the States north of this and west of Chicago the West. His North comprised all Canada, but he considered the province of Quebec the most prominent tramp territory in this district. His South was all that remained below his equatorial line, but the eastern part of it he nicknamed Niggerland, while the western part, bordering on the Pacific Ocean, he called the Coast.

This was the extent of Barcas's geography when I knew him. He seemed to realize that there are other countries in the world besides this one which he and his confères consider laid out for their own particular benefit; nevertheless, in daily life and conversation the other divisions of the world are so conscientiously ignored for all practical purposes, that North America may safely be said to comprise the American tramp's general idea of the earth. He knows well enough that he has brothers in other lands, but he considers them so unlucky in being left to ply their trade outside of his own peculiar paradise, that he feels it necessary to ignore them. For in spite of the constitutional Bohemianism of his nature, he is still far
from being a cosmopolitan. If he has suffering brethren in other communities, his heart does not throb for their sorrow. No, indeed! He simply says: "Why don't they get out o' those blasted holes and come over here? This is the only country for the tramp." There is a great deal of truth in this, and the purpose of this article is to give an account of tramp traits, successes, and failures in this land of freedom. I intend to take up the various districts as Barcus indicated them, not, however, because his points of the compass are at all typical or representative. No; Barcus's map is not for general circulation, and for this very good reason, it would probably be difficult to find ten vagrants whose views would coincide with his or with those of any other ten idlers. This is a peculiarity of the vagabond, and it must be excused, for it has its raison d'être. As for the facts which I give in these pages, I may say that, as a rule, they are founded on personal observation. Some years ago I lived with the wandering beggars of this country for eight months. I tramped, begged, and slept with them, and, when necessary, I accompanied them into jail. In this way I had some excellent opportunities of seeing their life from various points of view.

THE NORTH.

This district (Canada) hardly belongs to the real American vagabondage. It is true that the "hobo" crosses the frontier now and then, and makes a short journey into Quebec, but it can scarcely be called a trip on business. It is undertaken more for the sake of travel, and a desire to see "them fellers up in Canady," and the scenery too, if the traveler is a lover of nature, as many hoboes are. As a rule, Canada is left pretty much in the hands of the local vagrants, who are called "Frenchies." I have never thoroughly explored their territory, and, unfortunately, cannot write as definitively and comprehensively about their character as I would wish to do. However, the following facts are true as far as they go. The main clan of Canadian tramps is composed of French-Canadians and Indians. I have never met a genuine tramp of this class who was born in France proper; yet I can well believe that there are such. The language of these beggars is a jargon partly French and partly English, with a small hobo vocabulary added thereto. Only a very few American tramps can speak this queer jingo. I have met a gypsy now and then who at least understood it, and I account for this on the ground that a large number of the words resemble those in the gypsy dialect. Wine, for instance, means bread in both languages.

To be a successful beggar in Canada, one must be able to speak French, for Quebec is the main tramp district, and the local population uses this language principally. The "Galway" (Catholic priest) is perhaps the nickname of the American tramp.
the best friend of the Frenchies; at any rate, this has been my experience. He gives alms ten times where a peasant gives once, and when a vagabond can find a cloister or a convent, he is almost sure to be well taken care of. The peasants, it must be remembered, are about all the Frenchies have after the "Gal-

way." To show how wise they are in doling out their charity, it is only necessary to say that the usual Frenchy is content when he gets his three meals a day without working. And as for myself, I can say that I have gone hungry for over thirty hours at a stretch in Canada, and this, too, although I was careful to visit
every house that I passed. But the Canadian tramp is evidently satisfied with small rewards, else he could not live long in his chosen district. As I know him, he is a slow-going fellow fond of peace and quiet, and seldom desirous of those wild “slopping-ups” in American trampdom for which so much money is needed. If he can only have some outcast woman, or “sister,” as he calls her, to accompany him on his travels, and to make the little tent, which he often carries, homelike and comfortable; and if he can have his daily pâno, and his usual supply of dohnn (tobacco), he is a comparatively happy fellow. He reminds me more of the European loafer in general character than any other human parasite I can think of; and I shall be exceedingly sorry if he ever gets a foothold in the United States, because he is a vagrant down to the core, and this can hardly be said as yet of most American tramps.
It is almost impossible to touch his emotions, and he usually looks upon the world as his enemy. He can hardly be called a victim of liquor and riot, but rather the victim of an ill-matched parentage. He is often on the mercy of the world before he knows how he came into it, and it is not wonderful that he should drift into a class where no questions are asked, and where even the murderer is received with some distinction. To reform such a man requires that the social polity itself be permeated by a higher order of ethics than governs it at present—a truth as applicable to certain districts of the United States as elsewhere.

**The East.**

The tramps of this part of the country represent the main intelligence as well as “respectability” of the brotherhood. They also comprise the most successful criminal element. But of course the vocation of the great majority is simply begging. To tell exactly where they thrive, and to particularize too carefully, would demand much more space than an article of this sort affords. The most I can do is to give a very general idea of the district.

New England, as a whole, is at present poor begging territory for those vagabonds who are not clever and not able to dress fairly well. Boston is the beggar’s metropolis as well as the New England millionaire’s, and, until recently, Bughouse Mary’s Tramp Home was as much a Boston institution as Tremont Temple or the Common. One could find there tramps of all grades of intelligence, cleanliness, and manners. And even in the streets, I have often been able to pick out “the begging brothers” by the score from the general crowd. But it must not be forgotten that a city offers privileges to beggars which the rural districts deny, and probably, if the police authorities were more diligent than they are now, even Boston could be rid of the great majority of its worst loafers. I must admit, however, that it will be difficult ever to banish the entire tramp tribe, for some of them are exceedingly clever, and when decently clad can play the role of almost any member of society. For instance, I tramped through Connecticut and Rhode Island once with a “fawny man.” Both of us were respectfully dressed, and, according to my companion’s suggestion, we posed as strolling students, and always offered to pay for our meals and lodging; but the offer was never accepted. Why? Because the farmers “considered themselves repaid by the interesting accounts of our travels, and talks about politics,” etc. My friend was very sharp and keen, and carried on a successful trade in spurious jewelry with some of the foolish country boys, when he was not discussing the probabilities of the Presidential election. I am sure this is what I could have gone through in New England, had I been properly clad, and be gratuitously entertained wherever I should go; and simply because the credulity of the charitable is so favorable to “traveling gentlemen.”

One of the main reasons why Massachusetts is such poor territory for the usual class of vagrants is its district jail system. In many of these jails the order and discipline are superb, and work is required of the prisoners—and work is the last thing a real tramp ever means to undertake. I cannot help looking forward to very gratifying results to trampdom from the influence of the present Massachusetts jail system. For anything which brings the roving beggar into contact with sobriety and labor is bound to have a beneficial effect. New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan are all fairly good tramp States, and all swarm with allowed beggars. The most remarkable feature of vagrancy in New York State is that wonderful town known among vagrants as “The City” and also as “New York.” This is the most notorious tramp-nest in the United States. I have walked along the Bowery of an afternoon, and counted scores of men who never sold their hands with labor, and beg on an average a dollar a day. Even the policemen of this city are often friends of beggars, and I have seldom met a hobo who was very angry with a New York “bull.” As a rule, the police officer, when finding tramps drunk on doorsteps or begging, says in a coarse and brutal voice, “Get out,” and possibly gives them a rap with his club, but it is altogether too seldom that the beggar is arrested. One rather odd phase of tramp life in New York city is the shifting boundary line that marks the charity of the town. Several years ago, Eighty-ninth street was about as far uptown as one could secure fair rewards for diligent begging. Now one can see tramps, on a winter’s night especially, scattered all along One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street, not because this street is the only “good one,” but because it is so “good” that better profits are realized than in those farther down. And for clothes, I have always found Harlem more profitable than other parts of the city. New York city is also one of the best places in the country for “snaring a kid” — persuading some youngster to accompany an older beggar on the road. There are so many ragamuffins lying around loose and unprotected in the more disreputable quarters of the town, that it is only necessary to tell them a few “ghost-stories” (fancy tales of tramp life), to make them follow the story-teller as unresistingly as the boys of Hamelin marched after the Pied Piper.

1 A peddler of bogus jewelry.
Almost every third boy that one meets in the street on a quiet night is a tramp. This accounts for the fact that several tramps, one of whom is a popular character in the neighborhood, are frequently seen at the town hall, the grocery, or any other place where they are likely to be noticed. They are not always easily recognized, even for the most industrious among them. I have met with a number of men who were always on the lookout for a good deal. They would not hesitate to make use of any opportunity that offered itself, and were always ready to take advantage of any chance that came to hand. They were generally well-dressed, and were always ready to work if they could find a way to make money. They were not always as intelligent as they appeared, for they often took advantage of the situation to their own ends. They were generally well-read, and were always ready to talk when they could find a chance to do so.

Over in New Jersey, I think, there are more tramps to the square mile than in any other State, excepting Pennsylvania, and one finds the same state of affairs as in New York. The neighborhood around Newark, when I was in the city, was simply infested with beggars who met there on their way into and out of New York city. They often hang on the outskirts of the town, where they camp quite unmolested, unless they get drunk and draw their razors, which is much more common with Eastern tramps. It is surprising, too, how well they are fed, when one remembers that they have no place to sleep in this community for years. It is in Pennsylvania, however, that the tramp is best fed, while in New York city I do not know of a town or village in the Keystone State where a decent tramprocker cannot get all that he cares to eat without doing a stroke of work in payment. He can travel, too, more freely than elsewhere, for the railroads intersecting the State are the most friendly in the country. There is not one which does not harbor "dead-beats," at least at night. The jails are also a great boon to the fraternity. In the majority of them there is no work to do, while some furnish tobacco and the daily papers. Consequently, in winter, one can see tramps sitting comfortably on benches drawn close to the fire, and reading their morning paper, and smoking their after-breakfast pipe, as complacently and calmly as the merchant in his counting-room. Here they find refuge from the storms of winter, and make themselves entirely at home.

Ohio and Indiana, although fairly friendly to tramps, are noted for certain "horrible" features. The main one of these is the well-known "timber lesson"—clubbing at the hands of the inhabitants of certain towns. I experienced this muscular instruction at one unfortunate time in my life, and I must say that it is one of the best remedies for vagabondage that exist. But it is very cruel and often cruel. In company with two other tramps, I was made
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VAGABONDAGE in this part of the country is
peculiarly distinct. There are no “knock-on-
prushuns,” “gay-cats,” and a small number of
recognized tramps who, however, belong to
no one of the foregoing classes, and are known
simply as “Westerners.” The blanket-stiffs
are men (or sometimes women) who walk, or
“drill,” as they say, from Salt Lake City to San
Francisco about twice a year, begginng their
way from ranch to ranch, and always carrying
their blankets with them. The ex-prushuns are
young fellows who have served their appren-
ticeship as kids in the East, and are in the
West “looking for revenge”; i.e., seeking
some kid whom they can press into their service,
and compel to beg for them. The gay-cats are
men who will work for “very good money,”
and are usually in the West in the autumn to
take advantage of the high wages offered to
laborers during the harvest season. The West-
erners have no unique position, and resemble
the Easterner, except that they as well as the
majority of other Western rovers drink alcohol,
diluted in a little water, in preference to other
liquors. On this account, and also because
Western tramps very often look down upon
Eastern roadsters as “tenderfeet,” there is not
that brotherly feeling between the East and
the West in vagrancy that one might expect.
The Easterners think the Western brethren too
rough and wild, while the latter think the former
too tame. However, there is a continual inter-
course kept up by the passing of Westerners to
the East, and vice versa, and when neither party
is intoxicated, the quarrel seldom assumes very
dangerous proportions.

Of the States in the Western district, I think
that Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Colo-
rado, Washington, and a part of California are
the best for tramps. Illinois is thought especi-
ally well of by vagabonds because of its
“good” railroads. The Illinois Central, for in-
fact, is known the country over as the best for
a journey south, and I have known tramps to
travel from New York city to Chicago, and go
south by this line rather than start from New
York direct for New Orleans. The “C. B. & Q.”
is also a great “snap”; in fact, so much so that,
when I was on the road, it was called “the
bums’ line.” In Nebraska, where the “Q.” be-
comes the “B. & M. R.”, the lines are more
tightly drawn, and it behooves a roadster to
take to the trucks if he is anxious to make good
time. Truck-riding is necessary almost every-
where west of the Mississippi. Of course one
can “fool around” freight-trains, but he is
liable to be knocked off when the train is at
full speed, and unless this occurs on the Des-
ert, or where the ground is rather soft, it may
love dangerous. I once attempted to ride a
“freight” on the Southern Pacific road, and it
was the hardest experience I ever encountered.
I had to keep out of the brakeman’s way, but he
eventually found me, and ordered me to get up
on top. There I was made to turn my pockets
inside out to convince him that I had no
money. Being angered that I could not give
him a dime, he said: “Well, hit the gravel!
I can’t carry you on this train.” I told him
that I would never hit the gravel unless he
stopped the train. “You won’t, eh?” he said;
“well, now, we’ll see.” So he chased me over
his train for about fifteen minutes. I dodged
here and there, and found that I was quite able
to elude him as long as he alone followed me;
but soon the “Con.” appeared, and then the
chase began in earnest. They finally pressed
so near that I was compelled to climb down
the side of a cattle-car. They then tantalized
me by spitting and swearing. Finally the
“Con.” climbed down also, and stepped on my
fingers, so I had to let go. Fortunately, the
train was slackening its speed just then,—I
really think the engineer had a hand in the mat-
ter, for he is usually a good fellow,—and I
got off safely enough. But I had to “drill”
twenty miles that afternoon without a bite to eat
or a drink of water. In the far West after that
experience I always made use of the trucks.
Iowa is usually liked very much by road-
sters, but its temperament principles are tho-
roughly hated, as are also those of Kansas. It
is needless to say, however, that in the river
towns a tramp can usually have all the liquor
he can stand. I was in Burlington once when
there was a Grand Army celebration, which
the tramps were attending (!) in full force;
and the amount of “booze” that flowed was
something astounding for a “dry” State.
Nearly every vagrant that I met had a bottle,
and when I asked where it came from, I was
directed to an open saloon! A greatfad in Ne-
braska, Iowa, and Kansas is to beg from the
hotels. I have received hospitality in these
places when I could get absolutely nothing at
the private houses. This is especially true when
the cook is a negro. He will almost always
give a beggar a “set down” (square meal), and
sometimes he will include a bundle of food
“for the journey.” Still another fad when I
knew the country was to call at the peniten-
tiaries for clothes. I saw one fellow go into
Fort Madison “pen” (Iowa) one day with
clothes not only tattered and torn, but infested
with vermin. When he returned, I hardly knew
him, he was so well dressed. Stillwater Peni-
tentiary in Minnesota also had a notoriety for
benevolence of this sort, but I cannot affirm
this by personal observation.
tramps, is nevertheless a “poor” State, because it has no very large city, and is peopled largely with farmers and outsiders. It is, in short, the best place for a beggar. The Germans will give him all the beer he wants, and feed him well besides, for they are the most unwisely generous people in this country. Where they have a settlement, a tramp can thrive almost beyond description. For instance, in Milwaukee, as in other Wisconsin towns, he can “batter” for breakfast successfully from six o’clock until eleven o’clock in the morning, and is everywhere sure of a cup of coffee. I once attempted in Milwaukee to see just how many dinners I could get inside the ordinary dinner-time, and after an hour and a half of rather lukewarm search, I returned to the “hang-out” with three bundles of food, besides three dinners which had already been disposed of. I could have continued my dining indefinitely, had my capacity continued.

San Francisco and Denver are the main dependence of tramps in the West. If one meets a westward-bound beggar beyond the Mississippi, he may usually infer that the man is on his way to Denver; and if he is found on the other side of that city, and still westward bound, his destination is almost sure to be “Frisco,” or at least Salt Lake City, which is also a popular “hang-out.” Denver has a rather difficult task to perform, for the city is really a junction from which tramps start on their travels in various directions, and consequently the people have more than their share of beggars to feed. I have met in the city, at one time, as many as 150 bona-fide tramps, and every one had been in the town for over a week. The people, however, do not seem to feel the burden of this riff-raff addition to the population; at any rate, they befriend it most kindly. They seem especially willing to give money. I once knew a kid, or prushin, who averaged in Denver nearly three dollars a day for almost a week, by standing in front of shops and “battering” the ladies as they passed in and out. He was a handsome child, and this, of course, must be taken into consideration, for his success was really phenomenal.

“Frisco” is even better than Denver, furnishing districts in which tramps can thrive and remain for a longer time unmolested. There are more low lodging-houses, saloons, and dives; and there is also here a large native class whose character is not much higher than that of the tramp himself, so that he is lost among them—often to his own advantage. This difficulty of identification is a help to roadsters, for there is nothing that pleases and helps them so much as to be considered “town bums,” the latter being allowed privileges which are denied to strangers.

The estimation of the tramp the West does not rank with the East. The railroads are not so “good”; there are fewer cities; even the people are not so hospitable; some distinct people are too poor; and taking the country as a whole, the inhabitants are by no means so generous. I doubt whether the average gains of Western beggars amount to more than twenty-five cents a day. In “Frisco” and Denver, as well as in a few other large towns, begging is of course much more remunerative, but in the rural parts the average wage of a beggar is even below twenty cents a day, besides food: at least, this is the result of my observation.

In general the Western tramp is rough, often kind-hearted, wild and reckless; he always has his razor with him, and will “cut” whenever there is provocation. The “blanket-stiff” is perhaps the least violent of all; his long walking-tours seem to quiet his passion somewhat, and overcome his naturally wild tendencies. The “ex-prushin” is exactly the opposite, and I know of no roadster so cruel and mean to the weak as this young fellow, who is, after all, only a graduated kid. This is not so surprising, however, when one recollects that for years he has been subject to the whims and passions of various “jockers,” or protectors, and naturally enough, when released from his bondage, he is only too likely to wreak his pent-up feelings on the nearest victim. After a year or two of Western life he either subsides and returns to the East, or becomes more intimately connected with the true criminal class, and attempts to do “crooked work.” Several of the most notorious and successful thieves have been ex-prushins.

Just how many tramps there are in the West it is even more difficult to decide than in the East, because they are scattered over such wide territory. Experience makes me believe, however, that there are fully half as many voluntary idlers in this part of the country as in the East. And the great majority of them, I fear, are even more irreclaimable than their comrades in other communities. They laugh at law, sneer at morality, and give free rein to appetite. Because of this many of them never reach middle age.

The South.

Tramp life here has its own peculiarities. There are white loafers known as “hoboes,” which is the general technical term among white tramps everywhere, and there are the “shinies,” who are negroes. The odd part of it all is that these two classes hardly know each other: not that they hate each other or have any color line, but simply that they apparently cannot associate together with profit. The hobo seems to do better when traveling only with hoboes,
and the shiny lives much more comfortably in his own clan. My explanation of this fact is that the parties have learned by experience that alms are much more generously given to a white man when alone than when in company with a negro. This, of course, does not apply anywhere but in the South, for a colored tramp is just as well treated in the East and West as a white one.

My knowledge of the shiners is very meager, for I was compelled to travel as a hobo when studying vagrancy in the South, and I have never met a member of that class who knew very much about his negro confederates. From all that I can gather, however, I think that they resemble very closely the gay-cats, for they do not work and then, although their being on the road is usually quite voluntary, unless their natural propensities can be considered as a force compelling them into trampdom. Their dialect is as different from the usual tramp lingo as black from white, and I have never been able to master its orthography.

As the South in the main is only skinned over by many white tramps, and as a few cities represent the true strongholds of vagrancy, it is unnecessary to give any detailed account of this region. Besides, it is only in working that many tramps, excepting, of course, the shiny, are found here, and consequently there is not very much to describe, for they go into this part of the country principally to "rest up," and shun the cold weather prevalent in other districts. The chief destinations of wandering beggars in the South are New Orleans, St. Augustine, Jacksonville, Tallahassee, and Atlanta. Several towns in Texas are also popular "resting-places," but usually the tramps in Texas have begged their money in other States, and are there principally for "a great slopping-up," for which dissipation Texas furnishes much more suitable accommodations than any other State in the Union. The usual time for Eastern and Western tramps to start south is in October. During this month large squads of vagabonds will be found traveling toward "Orleans." I once was on an Illinois Central freight-train when seventy-three tramps were fellow-passengers, and nearly every one was bound for either Florida or Louisiana. These two States may almost be called the South so far as hoboes are concerned. New Orleans is especially a tramp-nest, and ranks second to New York in hospitality, according to my experience. In the older part of the town one can find beggars of almost every nationality, and its low dives are often supported by the visiting knights of the road. Begging, as they do, very fair sums of money, and being only too willing to spend it quickly, they afford these innkeepers of the baser sort very fair rewards for keeping up their miserable "hotels." A well-trained beggar can very often average a dollar a day in New Orleans if he begs diligently. But he must be careful not to be arrested, for the jails in the South are man-killing holes in many and many an instance. Even in the East and West several of the county prisons are bad enough, but they cannot compare in filth to some of the miserable cells of the South.

Jacksonville and St. Augustine are good "hang-outs" for tramps, and in the winter such visitors are very numerous. They make a very decent living off the transient tourists at these winter resorts. But success is so short and precarious there that many hoboes prefer New Orleans, on account of its steadier character, and seldom visit the other towns. Besides, to "batter" around the hotels in St. Augustine one should be respectably clad, and polite in manner and bearing, which, in most cases, involves far too much trouble.

The most generous people in the South are the poor, but not the negro poor, who, according to my experience, are by no means large-hearted. Take them in the East or West, and they are friendly enough, but on their native heath they are, as a rule, stingy. I have received much more hospitality from the "poor whites" than from any other people. The negroes, when I asked them for something to eat, would say: "Oh, go and ask the Missis. I can't give you anything;" and when I would call upon the "Missis," she was not to be seen. But the "poor white" would invite me into his shanty, and treat me as well as was in his power. It was not much, I must admit; but the spirit was willing though the pantry was nearly empty. In West Virginia, for instance, I have been entertained by some of the "hill people" in their log houses in the most hospitable manner. The obvious reason of this is a scarcity of tramps; when they are few, generosity is great, and the few get the benefit.

If the students of this particular phase of sociology will only look minutely and personally into the conditions under which trampdom thrives and increases in our country, Barca's map may yet become famous. Charles Godfrey Leland once wrote an article entitled "Wanted, Sign-Posts for Ginx's Baby." It would seem that his prayer has been answered, and that this unwanted, unprovided-for member of society has found his way through forest and mountains, over rivers and prairies, till now he knows the country far better than the philanthropist who would gladly get on his track. If this topographical survey shall serve to bring him nearer what should be, and what I am convinced aims to be, a source of betterment for him, Barca will not have lived in vain.

Josiah Flynt.