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## LIFE AMONG GERMAN TRAMPS.

WITH PICTURES BY WARNER ZEHME.

WILLIAM II. of Germany is the ruler of about fifty millions of people. A small fraction comprises the nobility, while the great majority are commoners, and the rest, about one hundred thousand, are roving beggars. His imperial majesty is probably well acquainted with his nobles, and he thinks that he understands the commoners, but the tramp who passes his castle now and then is a foreigner at home. Yet he is found in every city, town, and village, and there is hardly a home in the empire which he has not visited. He tramps the public highways as freely and fearlessly as the laborer, and rides on the royal railways as boldly as a king. His business in life is to prey upon the credulity of the charitable, and to steal when the eye of the law is not on watch. In spite, however, of all this publicity, but comparatively little is known of his real life and character. Various books and pamphlets have been written about him, but they have usually been grounded on second-hand information, as I have looked in vain for any account of a personal study of tramp life.

Being desirous of knowing the real facts in the case, I at first supplemented my reading by various conversations with beggars as they lounged around near my home in Berlin, and occasionally invited some of the more intelligent into my study, and plied them as cleverly as possible with all sorts of questions. But they invariably fooled me, and told the most romantic of tales, believing, probably, that they were what I wanted. Time after time I have said to them, "Oh, come now, give over this

story-telling, and let me have something that is really true." But they seemed unable to comprehend my purposes, and, true to their national traits, it was not in them to take part in any scheme which they could not understand. How to get at what I desired was the question. I called at the Bureau of Statistics, hoping surely to find here carefully tabulated statistics of vagrancy; but I was disappointed.

Dr. Berthold,<sup>1</sup> who kindly told me all he knew, said that Pastor von Bodelschwingh was the man who had made the best census of trampdom, and he had claimed that there were 200,000 arrests in Germany each year for begging; that 100,000 of them represented irreclaimable vagabonds, 80,000 bona-fide seekers of work, and the remaining 20,000 the maximum number of reclaimable beggars. Dr. Berthold continued: "The only way to know the entire truth about the tramp is to live with him. I had the intention to do this myself, but I delayed it too long, and now I am too old." He was very kind, and gave me some valuable hints, but admitted that nothing very definite was known about the wandering beggar.

I finally decided to give up these fruitless investigations, and to become a tramp myself in order to achieve my ends. I felt fairly equipped for such an undertaking, having had a two-years' residence in Germany, and having also played the tramp in my own country. My plan, however, was not to study the enforced

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Berthold is a well-known statistician, writer, and authority on matters pertaining to German Labor Colonies.

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vagrant, but rather the man who wanders because he desires to, and prefers begging to working. And in that which follows I have attempted to describe my experiences with voluntary beggars only.

On April 11 I made ready for the journey. My outfit was a close copy of the fashions in trampdom, my clothes being both old and easy to bear. I took no pass with me because, in the first place, I could not get a German



A BERLIN TYPE. ENGRAVED BY H. PAISCH.

pass, and, secondly, I was anxious to find out just what experiences an unidentified man must go through. If I were to repeat the experiment I should do differently. Having decided to begin my investigations in Magdeburg, there being various reasons why I should not play the beggar in Berlin, I left my home on the date mentioned, and hurried through the streets to the railway station, where I invested a few groschen in a fourth-class ticket. My first afternoon was consequently spent in

what very closely resembles the common American freight-car, except that it is windowed, and occasionally has planks braced against the sides to serve as seats. The floor, however, or a piece of baggage, is the more customary resting-place. A ride in this miserable box costs two pfennigs the kilometer, and the passengers are naturally of the lower order of travelers, including the tramps, who make quite as much use of fourth-class privileges as our own vagrants do of the freight-trains.

My companions on the first trip were a queer lot. In one end of the car was a band playing the vilest music for the few sechser (five-pfennig pieces) occasionally thrown down to them. Their only rival was a little tambourine girl, who danced and rattled her noisy instrument as if her life depended upon her agility, as no doubt it did. The other travelers were market-women, laborers, and journeymen, and a fellow called Peasant Carl, who was more of a tramp than anything else, in spite of the fact that he had a trade. We were soon talking on various subjects, and it was not difficult to lead the conversation to the subject of tramp life. Carl was considerably surprised to find that an American should be "auf der Walze" (on the road), and needed some proof ere he was convinced that I was a roadster. My old clothes and general forlorn condition were not sufficient, and I was compelled to tell him quite a story. Once satisfied on this point, he turned out to be a good friend, and among other valuable facts that he generously gave me were scraps from the German tramp vocabulary, which he said might "come handy," since I was a stranger. I found that *Kunde*, or customer, was the general word for vagrant, but as the term vaguely covers the thousands of traveling journeymen in the community also, another term has been invented for the genuine tramp, none other than *Chausseegraben-tapezirer*, or upholsterer of the highway ditches. What could be more genuinely, deliciously German?

As this dialect is rather unique, and as different from the German language proper as black from white, I am tempted to give a few more words, tabulating them, for comparison's sake, alongside their American equivalents:

English.	German.	German Tramp Dialect.	American Tramp Dialect.
Bread . . . . .	Das Brod . . . . .	Der Kramp . . . . .	Pank.
Water . . . . .	Das Wasser . . . . .	Der Gänsewein . . . . .	Der Gänsewein . . . . .
To beg . . . . .	Beuteln . . . . .	Abklappen . . . . .	To Batter.
To walk . . . . .	Laufen . . . . .	Tibbeln . . . . .	To Drill.
Policeman . . . . .	Der Schutzmann . . . . .	Der Putz . . . . .	The Bull.
The Gendarme . . . . .	Gendarmes . . . . .	Der Deckel . . . . .	Der Deckel . . . . .
Village . . . . .	Das Dorf . . . . .	Der Kaff . . . . .	Jerktown.
Whisky-flask . . . . .	Die Schnappflasche . . . . .	Die Finne . . . . .	The Growler.
(The) Passport . . . . .	Der Reise-Pass . . . . .	Die Flebbe . . . . .	Die Flebbe . . . . .
Hunger . . . . .	Der Hunger . . . . .	Der Kohldampf . . . . .	Der Kohldampf . . . . .



THE FOURTH-CLASS CAR.

ENGRAVED BY CHARLES WHITE.

This vocabulary will give a fair idea of the dialect. It is much more complete than the American, affording, as it does, ample means whereby entire secrecy can be secured in public places. It is spoken by both *Handwerksburschen* and tramps, and it is my opinion that the former were not the originators, as is sometimes averred, but have rather acquired a fair knowledge of it by associating year after year, on the road, with beggars.

On my arrival in Magdeburg, my friend Carl suggested that we go to Die Herberge zur Heimath, a lodging-house somewhat above the common grade, where we could at least have our supper, but where I could not lodge, having no pass. This institution must be distinguished from the ordinary Herberge, or low-class lodging-house, and has a history worth more than a passing paragraph. It is a sort of refined edition of the Salvation Army

Shelter, and was founded on religious and humanitarian principles largely by the efforts of Professor Perthes of Bonn, whose first enterprise of the kind, at Bonn, has been so widely copied that at least three hundred towns of Germany now furnish this comfortable and respectable refuge to the traveling apprentice or journeyman, and, if he will conform to its usages and requirements, to the tramp also.

Entering the main room of the Heimath, I was surprised to see Carl rap on a table and the men sitting at the same to follow suit. I found out later that this meant "Hello," and that the after-knock indicated "Allright." Shaking hands is also a customary greeting in German vagrancy, but hardly ever in American vagrancy. Tramps also call one another "Brother," and use the pronoun "thou" invariably in preference to "you." The inmates of the Heimath, I soon found, were drawn from three

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THE PEN.

ENGRAVED BY P. ATMAN.

classes. First, the apprentice making his first journey, and usually a very stupid fellow. The tramp was here also, but only, I think, to prey upon the Handwerksbursche, for no whisky is sold on the premises, and prayers are held morning and evening, a custom which all true roadsters despise. The rest were men fairly well on in life, who work occasionally and beg the remainder of the time. I counted altogether sixteen recognized beggars (Chausseegräbentapezirern), but made no attempt to make their acquaintance, having decided not to study them in foreign quarters, but to seek them in their real homes. For Die Herberge

zur Heimath is not a tramps' nest, although some Germans think so, and as soon as I had had a fair supper, for which I paid three cents, I left with Carl for another domicile. We were not long in finding the Herberge proper, or perhaps improper, where life is seen in all its dirtiest phases. Entering the common meeting room, and saluting as usual, we sat down at a table where there were other tramps also. I was immediately asked: "Wo kommst Du her? Wo willst Du hin? Was hast Du für geschäft?" I answered these questions as cleverly as I could, and was soon deep in various conversations. Before I had been talking long,

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I made the acquaintance of a beggar belonging to the class called *Kommando-Schieber*. These fellows beg usually within very small districts, and know every house that is "good" for a meal or a pfennig. My newly made friend was kind enough to instruct both Carl and me in regard to Magdeburg.

ging-letters. You can easily make quite a *stoss* [haul] if you work the plan well. Still, it's risky for strangers. If you're going to stay here long, you'd better make friends with the *Herbergsvater*. He's a pretty good *kerl* [fellow], and if you let him know that you've got a little money, he'll look out for



HUNTING FOR HIS PASS.

ENGRAVED BY P. AT&amp;A.

"This town is rather *heiss* [unfriendly]," said he, "but if you look out and beg very carefully you can get along. A great trick here now is to tip the *portier* of good houses, and thus get the pull on every flat in the building. You've got to look out for the *Putz*, though, for if you're caught, you're sure for twenty-four hours in the *Kasten* [prison]. Another scheme that works pretty well with us fellows who know the town is to send around beg-

ging-letters. You can easily make quite a *stoss* [haul] if you work the plan well. Still, it's risky for strangers. If you're going to stay here long, you'd better make friends with the *Herbergsvater*. He's a pretty good *kerl* [fellow], and if you let him know that you've got a little money, he'll look out for you when the *Putz* makes his inspection now and then. There's nothing, you know, like standing in with them that's *klug* [clever], and you can bet that fellow is. . . . What do you say to a schnapps, brother?"

He had earned his drink, for he gave me a great many hints which were necessary to successful begging. One of them was about getting a pass. "Now, if you can scrape a little coin together," he said, "I'll tell you how to



"ARE YOU CLEAN?"

ENGRAVED BY M. HAIDER.

I think the usual wage for diligent begging is between one mark fifty and four marks, in addition to the three meals. Of course there are a few who are much more successful. One fellow at the Herberge, for instance, who had been in England and could speak English quite well, claimed that he begged forty marks in one week last winter from the Americans in Dresden. Another vagrant told a story of a man he had met in south Germany on the road with two hundred marks in his pocket, which he had collected in two weeks in Munich. It is a great amusement for the tramp off duty to figure out

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the possibilities of his calling, and to illustrate the same with stories. There was one beggar in the room who even kept an account of his income and expenses. I saw the record for March, and found that his gains had been ninety-three marks and a few pfennigs, not including the meals which he had had in various kitchens where the servants were friendly. I must say right here, however, that such success is found only in cities. For I sampled the charity of the country time after time, and it is worth a bare living only, or, as Carl was wont to say, "One can't get fat on it."

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We were convinced of this as soon as we had left Magdeburg, and started afoot for Brunswick. Carl begged in every village that we passed through, but he could seldom get more than twenty or twenty-five pfennigs, with numerous slices of bread. I made no attempt to beg money, but visited several houses and asked for food so that my companions might not suspect me. I was fairly well treated, at least quite as charitably as I would have been in the States, and I think that, taking the country as a whole, the rewards of begging in Germany are much higher than in either England or America. The people seem bound to give, although they have had beggars among them for centuries.

My second night on the road was quite as interesting as the first. I had stopped with Carl and two other men in a little village not far from Brunswick, where there was no Herberge, and only one inn, or *Gasthaus*, as it was called. We asked the woman in charge if we could lodge for the night, but she was by no means friendly, saying we were unclean. She told us to go to the barn, where we could sleep for a groschen apiece. As there was nothing better to do, we followed her instructions, and spent the night, which was cold for April, on some bundles of straw. I was fairly well repaid for this unpleasant experience by the various conversations which I overheard. One tramp was philosophizing in a maudering way over his life on the road, and what first brought him there. He reasoned that as he was born lazy, the blame should be put on his parents, but he finally concluded that the Schnappsflasche also had had a hand in the business. Another companion said: "Why should I work, when I can beg more than I can possibly earn? Now if I should follow my trade I could earn about eighteen marks a week. But as a beggar I can beat that by ten marks. No, brother; it is n't all the blame of the Schnappsflasche that we're on the road. I, for one, am here because I can do better than anywhere else. Isn't that so?" And he nudged me for an answer.

"Well," I said, "we lads on the road seem to have more money than most laborers, but we seldom have a decent place to lay our heads. For instance, what sort of place is this we're in now?"

"Yes, that's true," he returned; "but then, we're never sick, always happy, and perhaps we're just as well off as anybody else. You forget that we never work, and that's a great thing in our favor. Those lads who have their homes have to work for them, and don't you forget it. It's my opinion that the home is n't worth the labor."

I think this latter opinion is quite general in German vagrancy, and is one of its main

causes. Liquor, however, is just as much of a curse in Germany as anywhere else, and brings more men into trampdom than is calculated. The Schnappsflasche is in nearly every tramp's pocket, and he usually empties it twice a day. It is a wonder to me how he can do it, for the schnapps is almost pure alcohol, and burns the throat terribly. Yet I found just outside of Brunswick a female tramp, nearly sixty years of age, who could empty Die Finne in a single "go," and seemed healthy too. This woman was the only feminine roadster I met during the journey, and I think she is one of the very few.

About noon of April 14 I arrived in Brunswick with Carl, who was on his way to Bremen, where he intended shipping as a coal-trimmer for New York, if possible. He was disgusted with Germany, he said, and felt that America was the only place for his nervous activity. He was somewhat surprised, however, as I was too, to find in Brunswick three American negroes who seemed to think quite the contrary of their country. One was an "actor," and the other two were ex-waiters, and they were traveling about the community and getting their living by dancing and singing in the streets and saloons. Charley — the actor — said: "We're doin' pretty well; have our three squares a day, and all the booze we want. Can't do better than that at home." I explained this to Carl, as none of the negroes spoke German; but he could not be convinced that gold was not lying loose in the streets of American cities. In the afternoon his hatred of Germany was not quite so intense, as he begged a mark and a half in about two hours. One man that he visited was a member of "The Society against Begging and Vagrancy," and had a sign to that effect on his gate-post; but Carl found him, it seems, a generous Samaritan. This interested me considerably, for I had heard good reports of this society and its members, as well as of its success in fighting vagabondage. I asked several fellows what they thought of the organization. One tramp claimed that he always visited its members, — at least those having signs on their gates, — for he was quite as apt to be well treated as not. Others were drastic in their criticisms, and said that the society would let a man starve rather than feed him. Carl, I think, was about right when he said that some members of the society fed vagrants, and some did not, and it was all according to chance.

From Brunswick a crowd of tramps, including myself, rode in a fourth-class car to a little station called Peine, in the direction of Hanover. A few of the men remained here in order to take in the *Verpflegung-Station* until the next day. This station, of which there are

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ON THE ROAD.



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AN AUCTION.

ENGRAVED BY A. F. ANDERSON.

was not sure whether it was in North or South America,—and asked me if I had ever met him. I told her that I had not, and she was nearly dumfounded. She thought that in the States, “where there were so few people,” everybody should know everybody else. I left her to her surprise and chagrin.

The city of Münster was my next stopping-place, and a greater contrast to Osnabrück could hardly exist. At the Herberge I learned that the town was considered one of the best between Hamburg and Cologne. The evidence was certainly convincing, for the tramps had all the liquor they could drink, as well as numerous bundles of food. Two fellows were doing a good business in exchanging their bread and *wurst* (sausage) for groschen which

others had begged instead of something to eat. I invested a few *sechser* in these wares, and was most bountifully repaid, receiving half a loaf of bread and two good-sized sausages for two and a half cents of our currency. This custom is very prevalent in German trampdom, and will illustrate the machinery of vagrancy. Some men will beg only for food, while others devote most of their lives to looking for money, and in almost any Herberge, even in the Heilmath, these two parties can be found trading as if they were in a market. They scold, jew, and fight one another while the trade is progressing, but when the bargain is finished good fellowship is again resumed. And the joviality in the Herberge after the “market” was as boisterous and companionable as if there had not

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been the slightest trouble. Even the innkeeper took part, and danced around the room with his guests as if he were as much of a tramp as some time in his life, for he entered into the schemes and plans as earnestly as the law allows. Some of the men were discussing the number of charitable families in Münster, and more especially those "good" for money. One man, in order to make good his point, enumerated by name the families friendly to beggars. The innkeeper, not agreeing with him,

It is needless to say that such a man is invaluable to beggars. They hold him dearer than any other member of the clan, and give nearly all of their money in his inn. This they can afford to do, for without his information and protection, they would encounter hardships and difficulties insurmountable. During my stay at the Herberge, the proprietor sent out as many as eight fellows to different parts of the town, well posted and equipped for successful begging. Three of



DANCING AROUND A BONFIRE.

ENGRAVED BY C. A. POWELL.

gave his own census of the Münster people, and it was most interesting to hear from his lips just what citizens were worth visiting and what not. Having conducted a tramp hotel in the city for years, he had found it to his interests to gather and dispense information useful to his customers. He could tell exactly what house was "good" for a meal or a "hand-out," and could also map out the districts sure to yield pfennigs, groschen, or half-mark

these men returned while I was still there, having averaged three marks and a half apiece in about five hours. If they had worked for this length of time their wage would have been about one mark apiece.

The journey from Münster to Düsseldorf is so tiresome afoot, and there is so little of interest lying between the towns, that I made the trip by rail, with three companions bound for Bavaria. These men had been tramping

around in northern Prussia for nearly two months, and were thoroughly disgusted with their experiences. This was not surprising, however, for the Bavarian as well as the Saxon tramps think there is no prosperity outside of their own provinces, and, wander as much as they will in foreign parts, usually return to their own fields, feeling that they made a mistake in leaving. Begging in these provinces is also much more remunerative than anywhere else in Germany. Even the religion in Bavaria favors mendicancy, and it is only necessary to stand on a Sunday morning in front of some church to make a very fair haul. The tramps loaf around in the neighborhood of the churches and *stossen* (tackle) the poor Catholics as they pass in and out, usually getting a pfennig at least. One old roadster, thankful that he had lost a leg in the war of 1870, was unusually successful; but I heard afterward that he had been in the city for years, and probably the people take care of him as a sort of relic. He was rather clever, too, and had formed some sage opinions on charity and poverty. "The poor people," he said, "are the best friends we have. They give ten times where the rich man gives once." This is an indisputable fact.

In Cologne, where I arrived April 21, the tramps were planning trips into southern Germany, Switzerland, and the Tyrol. I had intended to make at least one of these excursions, but I was tired, nauseated, and homesick. I made quick work with the towns of Elberfeld, Essex, Barmen, and Dortmund, and once settled down in Berlin, with almanac and gazetteer before me, found I had been 15 days "auf der Walze," had traveled over 1000 kilometers, studied more than 70 towns and villages, and met 341 voluntary vagrants, all of them, however, less voluntary than I.

The German tramp, if these experiences justify me in judging him, is a fairly intelligent fellow of not more than average tramp education, more stupid and less vicious than his American *confrère*, and with the traits of his nationality well stamped upon him. He is cautious, suspicious to a degree, ungenerous, but fairly just and square-dealing in the company of his fellows. He is too much of a Bohemian to be a Social Democrat, but has not enough patriotism to be easily fired with enthusiasm for his Kaiser. He loves schnapps and hates what he calls the "verdammte

Heiligkeit" such as Die Herberge zur Heimath seeks to cultivate. He has generally served his three years in the army, but will dodge the recruiting officer by skipping his country whenever possible, if he has not. Notwithstanding this pervasive lack of patriotism, he has his own dangers for the country. In the February riots in Berlin (1891) he was out in force, not for labor rights as against capital, but lending his shoulder to the wheel which he fondly hoped might turn in the direction of a general overthrow of the existing social state and order.

In regard to the public on which the German tramp lives and thrives, it is only necessary to say that it is even more inane generous than its counterpart in the United States. With all its groans under taxes, military and otherwise, it nevertheless takes upon itself voluntarily the burden of the voluntary vagrant—the man who will not work. This is the more surprising when one recollects that the entire theoretical treatment of beggars in Germany is founded on the supposition that each one is a bona-fide seeker of labor. The community practically says to the culprit: You can make use of our *Verpflegung-Stationen*, where you can work for your lodging and meals, and have also a half-day to search for work, if you can identify yourself as a seeker of labor. We not only offer this, but also attempt to guarantee you, through the efforts of our philanthropists, a casual refuge in Die Herberge zur Heimath, while you are out of work. And if, through untoward circumstances or through your own carelessness and weakness, you have fallen so low that the *Stationen* and the Heimath cannot take you in because your identification-papers are irregular, and you appear more of a vagabond than an unfortunate laborer, we then invite you into the Labor Colonies, founded also by our philanthropists, where you can remain until you have earned good clothes and a respectable name. But if we catch you begging, we will punish you as a vagrant; consequently you would do better to make use of all the privileges we offer, and thus break no laws. This is the theory, and I consider it a good one. But the man who will not work passes through these institutions as freely as the man who will, owing to the lack of determined discrimination on the part of the officers, and the desperate cleverness of the offenders.



ENGRAVED BY G. SCHMANNZUNGEN.  
A TYPE.

Josiah Flynt.