THE TRAMP AND THE RAILROADS.

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WITH PICTURES BY JAY HAMBIDGE.

FIVE years had elapsed since my last journey with the "hoboes"—indeed, since I had so much as seen them. Study and recreation took me to Europe in the autumn of 1893, and I did not return to this country till the spring of 1898. Newspaper clippings containing accounts of the movements of the hoboes, and stories about their life, occasionally reached me, and once there came an invitation to be present at an Anti-Tramp Congress, but beyond this I heard very little about my old companions of "the road." I always thought of them, however, when I saw the European vagabond trudging along on the public turnpikes, and wondered whether they were still permitted to travel on the railroads in their "side-door Pullmans" (box-cars) as they had done, and as they taught me to do when I was among them. In eastern Prussia I once stopped to talk with a foot-sore old wanderer on the *chaussée*, and told him of the way the American tramp travels. "Ach, how beautiful that must be!" he exclaimed. "And to think that they would probably hang us poor fellows here in the Fatherland if we should try to ride in that fashion! In truth, son, a republic is the only place for the poor and outcast."

There had been rumors, while I was still on the road, that a day of reckoning was coming between the railroad companies and the tramps, and that when it arrived the hobo, like the *Chausséegrabentapezirer*, would take to the turnpikes. Life in Hoboland is so precarious that it comes natural to the inhabitants to be on the watch for impending catastrophes, and I remember that I also believed that the railroad companies would eventually stop free riding as the tramp practised it. It did not seem natural that a class of people with so little influence as the tramps should be allowed to enjoy such a privilege long; and although I learned to ride in freight-cars with as much peace of mind and often more comfort than in passenger-coaches, there was always something strange to me in the fact that I never bought a ticket. During my first trip in Hoboland, which lasted eight continuous months, I must easily have traveled over twenty thousand miles, and there were not more than ten occasions during the entire experience when any payment was demanded of me, and on those occasions the "medium of exchange" consisted of such things as pipes, neckties, tobacco, and knives. Once I had to trade shoes with a brakeman merely to get across the Missouri River, a trip which ordinarily would have cost me but ten cents; but as that was the very sum of which I was short, and the brakeman wanted my shoes, the only thing to do was to trade.

Had any one told me, as I was leaving Europe, that a week after my arrival in this country I should be "hitting the road" again, I should not have believed him. Civilization had become very dear to me in the interval that had elapsed since my last tramp trip, and it seemed to me that my vagabond days were over.

Once a vagabond, however, like the reserve Prussian soldier, a man can always be called on for duty, and it was my fate, a few days after setting foot in my native land again, to be asked by the general manager of one of our railroads to make a report to him on the tramp situation on the lines under his control. For three years he had been hard at work organizing a railroad police force which was to rid the lines under his control of the tramp nuisance, and he believed that he was gradually succeeding in his task; but he wanted me to go over his property and give an independent opinion of what had been done. He had read some of my papers in THE CENTURY on tramp life, and while reading them it had occurred to him that I might be able to gather information for him which he could turn to good account, and he sent for me.

"On assuming management of these lines," he said to me in the conversation we had in his office, "I found that our trains were carrying thousands of trespassers, and that our freight-cars were frequently being robbed. I considered it a part of my busi-

shows that in a great majority of cases we have the active support of the local police authorities and that the magistrates have done their full duty. Third, it was feared that there might be some retaliation by the tramps. Up to date we have but very little to complain of on that score. From the reports that I get from my men, I am led to believe that we are gradually ridding not only the

ness as a general manager to do my utmost to relieve the company of this expense, and I felt that the company owed it to the public to refuse to harbor this criminal class of people. In a way a railroad may be called the chief citizen of a State, and in this tramp matter it seemed to me that it had a duty as a citizen to discharge to the State.

"There are three conspicuous reasons that have deterred railroad people from attacking the tramp problem. First, it has been thought that it would entail a very great expense. Our experience on these lines has shown that this fear was not warranted. Second, it has been thought that no support would be given the movement by the local magistrates and police authorities. Our experience

A COMPARISON OF AMERICAN AND ENGLISH METHODS OF TRAMP TRAVEL.

A BRAKEMAN OF A FREIGHT-TRAIN COLLECTING FARES.

railroad property, but much of the territory in which it is situated, of the tramp nuisance; but I should like a statement from you in regard to the situation, and I want to know whether you are willing to make a tramp trip and find out for us all that you can."

It was a cold, bleak day in March when we had this conversation, and there was every inducement to postpone a journey such as the general manager suggested; but I was so impressed with his seriousness in the matter, and so thoroughly interested in what he had done, that I agreed to begin the investigation at once. It seemed to me that a man who had written so much about the tramp problem ought to be willing to do what he could to help the community solve it, especially when he was to be reimbursed for his work as liberally as I was to be; and although I suffered more on this particular journey than on any other that I have made, I shall never regret having undertaken it.

Before starting out on my travels a contract was drawn up between the general manager and myself. It secured to me a most satisfactory daily wage, and to the general manager weekly reports as long as I was "out on the road," with a final statement when the investigation should be finished.

On no previous journey in Hoboland have I been such an object of curiosity to the tramps as on this one when writing my weekly reports. I was dressed so badly that I could write them only in lodging-houses where vagabonds sojourn, and it usually took me a full half-hour to finish one. It availed nothing to pick out a quiet corner, for the men gathered about me the minute they thought I had written enough, and they thought this before I was half through. If they had been able to decipher my handwriting I doubt whether I should be writing this article now, but as they were not, they amused themselves with funny remarks. "Give 'er my love," they said. "Writin' yer will, are ye, Cigarette?" "Break the news gently." And they made other similar remarks which, if I had not been forced to write, would have smothered any literary aspirations that a lodging-house is capable of arousing. As it was, I managed to send in my reports more or less regularly, and faulty though they must have been, they served their purpose.

They told the story of the tramp situation on about two thousand miles of railroad property, situated in five different States. The reports of the first month of the investigation pertained to tramps on lines in the neighborhood of the property I was investigating. I had not been an hour on my travels when it was made very plain to me that my employer's police force was so vigilant that it behooved me not to be caught riding trains unauthorized on his lines. Every tramp I met warned me against this particular road, and although a clause in my contract secured me

the payment by the company of all fines that might be imposed upon me as a trespasser, as well as my salary during imprisonment, in case I should find it useful for my purposes to go to jail, I found it more convenient for the first month to wander about on railroads which I knew tramps could get over. I reasoned that the experience was going to be hard enough anyhow, without having to dodge a railroad police officer every time I boarded a train, and I knew that the trespassers on neighboring lines would be able to tell me what was the general opinion in regard to my employer's road as a tramp thoroughfare. All whom I interviewed spoke of it as the hardest railroad in the United States for a tramp to beat, and I could not have learned more of the tramps' opinion of it had I remained exclusively on the property. The roads that I went over crossed and recrossed my employer's road at a number of places, and I was frequently able to see for myself that it is a closed line for trespassers.

It may interest the reader to know how I lived during the time I traveled as a tramp. Except on one occasion, when my funds gave out, I paid my way regularly so far as food was concerned. A friend sent me a postal order for a few dollars nearly every week, and I managed to live rather comfortably at lodging-house restaurants. Occasionally I would meet a "pal" of former years, and if he had money, or found that I had, nothing would do but we should celebrate meeting each other again, and at such times my friend in the East got word that my remittance must be hurried up somewhat; but, as a general thing, I dined fairly well on two dollars a week. For sleeping-quarters I had bunks in lodging-houses, benches in police stations, and "newspaper beds" in railroad "sandhouses." I chose one of these places as circumstances suggested. If there was nothing to be gained by going to a sandhouse or a police station, I took in a lodging-house, if one was handy. Once I slept in the tramp ward of a poorhouse, and never had I spent a more disagreeable night. A crowd of tramps to which I had attached myself had used up their welcome in a town where there were three police stations, and it had been arranged that on the night in question we should all meet at the tramp ward of the poorhouse. A negro was the first one to get there, and a more frightened human being than he was when the rest of us put in an appearance, it would be hard to imagine. We found him in a cold cellar, absolutely without light and furnished with nothing but an immense bench, about four feet wide, four feet high, and ten feet long. In Siberia itself I have never seen a gloomier hole for men to pass a night in.

"I turned up here 'bout five o'clock," the negro said, "'n' they sent me to the smokin' room, where them luny blokes was smokin' their pipes. I never knew before that they sent luny people to poorhouses, 'n' I

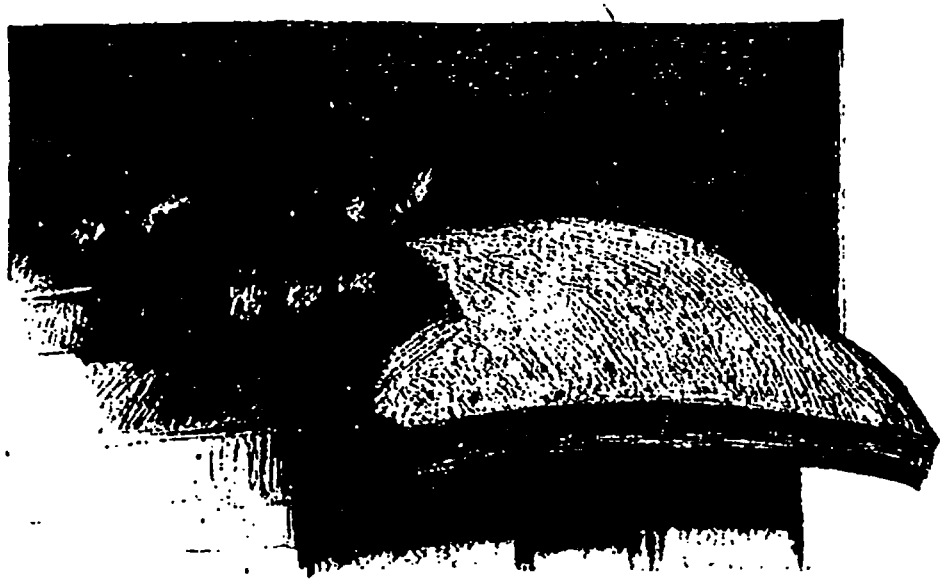
YOUTHFUL TRESPASSERS.

could n't understan' it. I told one of 'em what I was there for, 'n' he told me that this cellar down here has ghosts in it. Well, o' course, I ain't 'feard o' ghosts in most places, but, by jiminy, when the keeper came 'n' put me down here 'n' left me in the cold 'n' dark, somehow or other I got to thinkin' o' that luny bloke's stories, 'n' I jus' had to holler. W'y, I never felt so queer before in my life. Suppose I 'd gone crazy; why, I could 'a' sued the county for damages, could n't I? Don't you ever soogest any more poorhouses to me; I don't wonder people goes crazy in 'em." When the crowd first saw the negro he was shouting at the top of his voice: "Spirits! spirits! There 's spooks down here!"

We all spent a most miserable night in the cellar, and I doubt whether any one of us would willingly seek shelter there again.

Indeed, when the first month of my investigation was over, and war had been declared with Spain, it seemed to me that I had gone through so much and was so hardened that I could go to Cuba and worry through all kinds of trouble. I have since regretted that I did not go, but, at the time, I had become so interested in the work that, when I returned to my employer for further orders, and he said to me, "Well, now that you have satisfied me in regard to the attitude of the tramp toward the company's property, suppose you satisfy yourself concerning the attitude of the company toward the tramp," I readily fell in with the suggestion. To make my final report complete it was obvious that I ought to get an insight into the workings of my employer's police force, and for the second month he gave me permission to travel on freight-trains, engines, and passenger-trains, and a letter introducing me to the different employees of the company with whom I was likely to come in contact. With these credentials I was able to circulate freely over the property, to inquire minutely into the work of the police department, to meet the local magistrates, and particularly the jail- and workhouse-keepers. It was also possible for me to make an actual count of the trespassers who were daring enough to attempt to travel on this closed road.

This work was not so tedious and dangerous as that of the first month, and there were more comforts to be enjoyed; but I had to be up at all hours of the night, and the bulk of my time was spent in train-riding. After thirty days of almost constant travel I was convinced first that the tramps had told the truth about the road, and that it is exceedingly difficult to trespass on it with impunity; second, that although the police force is not perfect (none is), it was doing exceptionally good work in freeing the community of tramps and beggars. It differs from ordinary railroad police forces in that it is systematically organized and governed. In dealing with tramps and trespassers the plan is to keep up a continuous surveillance of them, and they are taken off trains one by one, day after day, rather than in squads of fifty and sixty, with no more effort in this direction for weeks and sometimes months, as is the prevailing custom on most railroads. There is consequently very little crowding of magistrates' courts and jails, and the taxpayers are not forced to board and lodge a great



BEATING A PASSENGER-TRAIN.

collection of vagabonds. I was also impressed with the fact that the force is on friendly relations with municipal and village police organizations along the road, and has the respect of communities formerly at the mercy of a constantly increasing army of hoboes.

So much for my personal experience and finding in this latest investigation in "tramp-ology"; it was as interesting a tramp trip as I have ever made, and I learned more about the best methods to employ in attacking the tramp problem in this country than on any previous journey. It is now my firm belief that, if the tramps can be kept off the railroads, their organization will become so unattractive that it will never again appeal to men as it has done in the past; and the purpose of this paper is to make plain the necessity of keeping them off the railroads, and to show what results from their present unique position in railroad life. No other country in the world transports its beggars from place to place free of charge, and there is no reason why this country should do so.

The custom has grown up in the United States during the last thirty years. Before the Civil War there were comparatively few tramps in America, and practically no railroad tramps. After the war there suddenly appeared on the scene a large class of men who had become so enamoured of camp life that they found it impossible to return to quiet living, and they took to wandering about the country. Occasionally they worked a little to keep themselves in "pin-money," but by 1870, hundreds of them had given up all intention of working, and had founded the organization known to-day as the "Hobo-Push." By that year, also, they had discovered that our turnpikes, particularly in the West, were very poor roads to travel on, and they began to walk on the railroad-track.

If, at this time, the railroad companies had laws passed, such as are in force to-day in Great Britain and on the Continent, forbidding everybody but an employee to walk on railroad property, except at public crossings, we should have learned, ere this, to obey them, and the railroad tramp would not have been developed. These laws not being enacted, however, it was not long before it became very clear to the tramp that it would be much more comfortable to sit in a box-car and ride, than to "drill" (walk) over the ties. An appreciation of this character is acted upon very soon in Hoboland, and by 1875 the majority of the professional vagrants were taking lessons in jumping on and off moving freight-trains. The trainmen, partly because they thought that many of these trespassers were deserving but penniless out-of-works, and partly on account of the inborn willingness of every American to help a man in unfortunate circumstances, made practically no serious effort to keep the tramp off their trains, and by 1880 the latter was accepted by railroad companies as an unavoidable nuisance on railroad property.

To-day it is the boast of the hoboes that they can travel in every State of the Union for a mill per mile, while in a number of States they pay nothing at all. On lines where brakemen demand money of them, ten cents is usually sufficient to settle for a journey of a hundred miles, and twenty cents often secures a night's ride. They have different methods of riding, among which the favorite is to steal into an empty box-car on a freight-train. At night this is comparatively easy to do; on many roads it is possible to travel this way, undisturbed, till morning. If the train has no "empties," they must ride on top of the car, between the "bumpers," on one of the car ladders, or on the rods. On passenger-trains they ride on top, on the "blind baggage," and on the trucks.

Taking this country by and large, it is no exaggeration to say that every night in the year ten thousand free passengers of the tramp genus travel on the different railroads in the ways mentioned, and that ten thousand more are waiting at watering-tanks and in railroad yards for opportunities to get on the trains. I estimate the professional tramp population at about sixty thousand, a third of whom are generally on the move.

In summer the entire tramp fraternity may be said to be "in transit." The average number of miles traveled daily by each man at this season of the year is about fifty, which, if paid for at regular rates, would cost, say, a dollar. Of course one should not ordinarily pay so much to ride in a box-car as in a passenger-coach, but the ordinary tramp is about as comfortable in one as in the other, and, on the dollar-a-trip basis, he and his 59,999 companions succeed in getting out of the railroad companies sixty thousand dollars' worth of free transportation every day that they all travel. Multiply this figure by a hundred, which is about the number of days in a year when all trampdom "flits," and you have an approximate idea of how much they gain.

Another serious loss to the railroads is that involved in the disappearance of goods under-

nsportation, and in claims for per-
ries. Some tramps steal, and some
t every year considerable thefts are
n freight-cars, and tramps, or men

HALF-TONE PLATE ENGRAVED BY F. H. WELLINGTON.

A TRAMPS' DEPOT.

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essional thieves frequently become
a time, both to minimize their guilt
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by them. Tramps proper are dis-
hieves, and I have seldom known

them to steal anything more valuable than fruit from freight-cars and metal from idle engines. In a year's time, however, including all the thefts committed by both tramps and professional thieves, a very appreciable loss results to the railroads, and I can recall, out of my observation, robberies which have amounted to several thousand dollars.

That railroad companies should have to reimburse trespassers for the loss of a hand or foot while riding unauthorized on trains

will strike every one as a very unjust tax on their resources, but such claims are constantly made. Let us say, for example, that a young boy who has been stealing his way on a freight-train loses a leg. There is a type of lawyer who at once takes up a case of this sort, going to the boy's parents or relatives and suggesting to them the advisability of claiming damages, asserting his readiness to serve them in the matter. "All right," says the father; "get what you can." In court the lawyer draws a horrible picture of these engines of death, the railroads, showing how they are constantly killing people. If the boy's father is poor, this fact is also brought graphically to the attention of the jury, and the wealth of the corporation is described as something enormous. If the lawyer manages his case cleverly, making out that the boy was enticed on to the freight-train by the trainmen, or that he fell under the wheels through their carelessness, there are but few juries that will refuse to give the father at least enough damages to pay the lawyer's fee and the doctor's bill, and then there is a celebration over having "squeezed" another railroad company. For a private person to be compelled by a court to pay damages to the father of a boy who fell from an apple-tree in the private person's orchard, where the lad was an obvious trespasser and thief, would be considered an outrage.

I bring out these facts about the losses to the railroad in some detail because the public is really the railroad company, and consequently the sufferer.

To tell all that the country at large suffers from the free railroad transportation of tramps would take me beyond the limits of a paper of this character, but there are a few points which must be noted. In the first place, the railroads spread the tramp nuisance over a much greater stretch of territory than would be the case if the tramps were limited to the turnpikes. There are districts in the United States which are so difficult to reach by the highroad, on account of unprofitable intermediate territory, that the hobo would never attempt to go near them if it were not easy for him to get over the disagreeable parts of the journey in a box-car. Take the trip from Denver to San Francisco, for instance. There is not a vagabond in the country who would undertake to walk across the American Desert merely to reach "'Frisco," and if walking were the only way to get to that city it would be left largely to "coast beggars." As matters now stand, however, you may see a beggar one day in Fifth Avenue in New York city, and a fortnight later he will accost you in Market street in San Francisco. Many tramps can travel as rapidly as the man who pays his way, and I have known those who could even "hold down" the Chicago Limited from Jersey City to Chicago without a break.

All this contributes to the difficulty of locating and capturing the dangerous characters of tramp life; and, as I have said, many professional criminals, who have nothing to do with beggars in other quarters, mix with them in freight-cars.

A remark, in this connection, of Mr. Allen Pinkerton is popular in Hoboland. He is reported by them to have once said, in a conversation about the capture of criminals, that he thought he could catch, in time, almost any kind of criminal except the tramp, and him he could not catch because it was so difficult to locate him. "One day he is in a barn, the next in a haystack, and the next Heaven only knows where he is, for he has probably got on to the railroad, and there you might as well look for a lost pin."

The railroads also help to keep the tramp element in our large cities. It very seldom settles in the country, and not for any length of time in provincial towns. New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, San Francisco, Buffalo, Baltimore, New Orleans, and other like places are its main strongholds. The more the criminal element of a country fastens itself upon its cities, the harder it is to break up, and in the United States this is what is taking place. Chicago, for instance, is as much a center in the criminal as in the business world, and almost every freight-train entering it brings a contribution to its criminal population. Even without railroads the tendency of crime to predominate in towns would exist; evil-doers feel more at home in city streets and haunts than in the country; but their present strength in our cities is largely due to the free transportation they get from the railroads.

Another striking fact is that out-of-works who "beat their way" on freight-trains very easily degenerate into professional vagabonds. I have traveled with men who, in six months' time, had become voluntary vagrants merely because their first stolen rides, while in search of work, had demonstrated to them how easy it is to manage without working and paying their way. The average unemployed man in the United States goes from one large city to another, rather than, as is the custom in Europe,

taking in the intermediate towns and villages, where there is no such likelihood of the labor market becoming congested. In a few weeks, unless he is a man of very strong character, he learns to travel merely for travel's sake, and develops into a "stake-man," who only works long enough to get a "stake" and then go off on a trip again. Among the so-called unemployed in this country there are thousands of this type, and they are the result of this love of side-door Pullman excursions.

There is one more fact which cannot be overlooked—the temptation which the railroads have for a romantic and adventuresome boy. A child possessed of *Wanderlust* generally wanders for a while, anyhow, but the chance he now has to jump on a freight-train and "get into the world quick," as I have heard lads of this temperament remark, has a great deal to do in tempting him to run away from home. Hoboland is overrun with youngsters who have got there on the railroads, and very few of them ever wander back to their parents. Once started "railroading," they go on and on, and its attractions seem to increase as the years go by. Walking has no such charms for them, and if it were their only method of seeing the world, the majority of those who now keep on seeing it, until death ends their roaming, would grow tired. The railroad, however, makes it possible for them to keep shifting the scenes they enjoy, and, in time, change and variety become so essential that they are unable to settle down anywhere. They are victims of what tramps call the "railroad fever," a malady for which a remedy has yet to be prescribed.

CAN the tramps be driven off the railroads? It was to satisfy my own curiosity in regard to this question, and to find out how successful my employer, the general manager, had been in his attempt to answer it in the affirmative, that I undertook the investigation which I have described. Previous to his efforts to keep tramps off railroads, it had been thought, as he has stated, that it was cheaper to put up with them, nuisance though they were, than to pay the bills which a crusade against them would occasion. It has at last been demonstrated, however, that tramps can be refused free transportation by one of our greatest railroads, with a saving of expense to the company and with great benefit to the community, and the time has come when the public is justified in demanding that all railroads take a similar stand in regard to this evil.

If all the railroad companies would agree upon concerted action against tramps, in a few years the following very satisfactory results would be achieved: first, very few tramps, if any, would try to beat their way on trains; second, an appreciable number of them would give up tramping entirely, because their present railroad privileges are to many the main attractions of the life; third, a few would try to become professional criminals again, partly out of revenge and partly because tramping on the turnpikes would be too disagreeable; and, fourth, a large number would take to the highways, where some might be made to do farm-work, and where all would, at least, be in touch with farm life. The reader may take exception to the third possibility, and think that great harm would come of an increase in the professional criminal class; but, as I have said, tramps are really discouraged criminals, and a return to the old life, of which they made a failure, would only land them in the penitentiary.

It is probably impossible ever entirely to eliminate the vagrant element in a nation's life, and no such hope is held out in connection with the reform advocated in this article; but this much is certain: had all the railroads been as closed to tramps, during my first excursions into Hoboland, as one of them has recently become, one man, at least, would not have attempted any free riding, and would not have found so many tramps to study.