

TRAMPS AND TRAMP LORE.

By J. A. E.

A bright military-looking young fellow entered the study of Professor Max Muller about the year 1850, shortly after the Schleswig-Holstein war, representing himself as an ex-officer in the Danish army who had seen active service in the recent conflict. He enlisted the interest and attention of the professor by telling of his desertion to the rebels, his capture and imprisonment after one of the engagements, his degradation by his former superior officers, and his ultimate conviction for high treason and sentence to death. Singularly enough, this latter fate did not disturb him in the least, for he knew perfectly well that his dear friend, the Queen of Denmark, would never allow that sentence to be executed. "Give me some paper," he exclaims, "that I may write to my beloved Queen and tell her of my safe arrival in England, for she will be in great distress until she hears from me." He sat down and wrote a note couched in the most affectionate and intimate terms. It was stamped, sealed, addressed to her Majesty at Copenhagen, mailed, and must in due time have been delivered. Some days afterward a reply, purporting to have come from the Queen, was received. One inconvenience this aristocratic youth experienced. He carried a bullet in his leg as a result of his military zeal. Could the gentleman accommodate him with the needful to have it extracted? When he reached his native land he would, of course, send a cheque. This romantic tale and its dramatic narration drew many a handsome gift from English pockets. It is needless to say that he was a brazen fraud, and must have had one or more clever confederates.

The poor we have always with us, and among the poor, tramps form the leisure class. They fulfil none of the duties of good citizens, except the doubtful one under the circumstances, to "be fruitful and multiply." They represent different strata of intelligence, from lamentable ignorance to university rank. They have no visible means of support, and no abiding place of residence or shelter. "They tell not, neither do they spin." They disdain the drudgery of useful labor, and jauntily face the hardships that are the necessary accompaniment of their career. If pleasure be the chief aim of their lives, how pathetically rare and expensive it must be. If ever in human history life might be expected to follow the lines of least resistance, it would be in the case of these purposeless waifs. Yet how hunger, cold, rags and dirt can present less resistance than the comparative happiness of a home, the reward of moderate industry and intelligence, is one of the difficult problems of human nature. To the socialistic demagogue the tramp is an unfortunate brother trudging up and down the earth seeking employment and finding none. With tearful eloquence he bewails his misfortunes, and rails at society for its selfishness and neglect. But everyone knows that the tramp has no use for work. Work is his natural enemy, especially if it be useful. This cannot therefore be an accurate explanation of his wanderings.

The deft hand of fiction has lifted the tramp into a more romantic and picturesque sphere. It is not his antipathy to work, nor because he is consumed by a morbid cynicism, and feels that every man's hand is against him, that he begs his daily bread, but because he has the refined blood of democracy in his veins. Liberty is the first and final article in his creed. He cannot endure the restraints and conventions of a fixed home and organized society. A crust of bread and a straw pile are to be preferred by this martyr to lofty sentiments to a steak and a mattress. He must hear the birds whistle and bask in the sunshine. He must hold close and constant communion

with Nature, and in fact becomes Nature's child. But so far as we can see, Nature has no reason to be proud of such progeny, as seen in the flesh. His liberty is a silly myth. He has negatived every law of hygiene. The birds have no calls for him, and he seeks not to know Nature. Slowness, improvidence, dissipation of manly energy are marked in every movement. It is nevertheless a curious fact that cases are on record where professional tramps have declined generous provision for their comfort, preferring their strange, nomadic life to what would seem to be the necessary suggestion of our first physical instincts.

James Chambers, a somewhat noted tramp of the latter part of the last and beginning of the present century, attracted public attention by writing verses which showed some ability on the part of the poetaster. He began his wanderings at sixteen, and continued them until he was seventy-two. A journalist, becoming interested in him, took up his case, and succeeded in securing and furnishing a cottage, which was to be his for life. His poems were to be published and the incomes applied to his maintenance. But Chambers could not stand his comfortable quarters for more than a month or two, when he resumed his roving habits, sleeping in barns where the snow at times drifted in upon him, and soliciting his food from door to door. Yet, strange to say, this trend of life was not his ideal, for his verses are full of doleful complaints concerning his poverty and the hardships he had to endure. A writer in the Cornhill Magazine tells of an old woman, nearly eighty years of age, who had been a tramp almost all her life, and at last, falling into the hands of the law, was lodged in jail, much to her chagrin. She looked forward with eager expectancy to the day when she would be released, although that occurred in November, and she was most miserably clad. Benevolent friends, taking compassion upon her, made arrangements for her shelter and comfort, but she scoffed at their thoughtfulness. "I am going on the road," she exclaimed, "as I have done all my life, and will do to the end of it." And she did.

Among the "Four hundred" of trampdom this peculiar style of life presents another aspect. It is not drudgery nor misfortune, but sport. They are gentlemen of leisure on a perpetual holiday, and begging rivals in exciting incident the big game covers of India and the roulette wheels at Monte Carlo. "Talk of shooting partridges and pheasants," said one of these gentry; "talk of racing and gambling; there is no sport like begging. There must always be risk in sport, and the risk in begging is very great. You are fighting against tremendous odds. You ring at the door, and you must first of all face a servant, who generally scrutinizes you with great suspicion, and declines to take your name or your card unless you have a clean shirt and a decent pair of boots. Then after you have been admitted to the presence, you have to watch every expression of your enemy or your friend, as the case may be. You have to face the cleverest people in the world, and you know all the time that the slightest mistake in your looks or the tone of your voice may lead to ruin. You may be kicked out of the house, and if you meet with a high-minded and public-spirited gentleman who does not mind trouble and expense, you may find yourself in the hands of the police for trying to obtain money under false pretenses. "No," he concluded, "I have known in my time what hunting, shooting and gambling are, and I can assure you there is no sport like begging."

It is with amazing cleverness these fellows make known their wants, and enlist the sympathy of those to whom they appeal. They shed tears or crack a joke as occasion requires. They can tell a tale of harrowing endurance and enlarge upon the

nobility of their aim and motive until the very angels weep in pity. They make a study of their proposed victim, and with almost unerring accuracy they can touch his vulnerable spot. They include his friends in their enterprising inventory, and can show an intimacy with those he holds in highest esteem. They can describe your friend's house, conservatory, horses. They can enlarge upon his little peculiarities, and familiarly refer to him by his Christian name. How is flesh and blood to resist such an appeal? In turning him out you may be doing a grave injustice to an honorable but unfortunate fellow-citizen, to say nothing of offending your friend. But while your hand is feeling for your pocket-book, a lurking suspicion suggests that a clever scoundrel stands before you. What a pity tramp brains are not put to a higher use, for lack of brains is not a conspicuous failing among these men? Professor Boyesen, of Columbia, relates an amusing interview with a seedy and lugubrious ex-student, who had battled ineffectually with an adverse fate. After pointing out his adversities and attainments, he suggested that an appointment to a professorship in Columbia College would be acceptable. If, however, there were no chair vacant, why, he would be willing to connect himself with a less conspicuous institution. The professor listened for half an hour, and concluded the interview by reproaching him for wasted opportunities and absurd aspirations. When a request for money to go somewhere was refused, he exclaimed: "If I have to lie in order to make an honest living, why you ought to thank your stars that you are so situated that you don't have to. If I were inadvertently to lapse into veracity, I should starve. No fellow would give me a shilling." Another specimen of this genus presented himself to the friends of a well-known Oxford professor, palming himself off as an impecunious and unfortunate brother of the aforesaid. In spite of the fact that the professor had no brother, and twice warned the public through the press, for a time he received almost daily letters from friends who had been imposed upon. On one occasion he called upon a leading London financier, telling the old story of being robbed and wanting a ticket to go to Oxford to see his dear brother. He soon found that he had appealed to the wrong party, when the lady of the house, coming into the room and hearing his story, remarked that she was closely related to the person indicated. Without a moment's hesitation this bundle of nerve and audacity rushed forward to embrace his new-found relative, who, however, hastily retired from the scene. The young scoundrel was at once shown to the door and bade to begone. "I am going to the station; kindly bid your servant call a cab," was the cool request of the impostor. This was done. "Be good enough to give the caddy a shilling for his services," he added, as he stepped into the carriage. The astonished gentleman acquiesced, and was forced to acknowledge that he had been swindled with his eyes open.

While piety is not forgotten when the occasion demands it, the average tramp is not a regular churchgoer as may be imagined. An old tramp who had spent all his life on the road was asked if he ever went to church? He admitted that he had been there once—that was when his so-called wife was buried. "He went in to see how they would finish up the old 'ooman.'" He said "a chap in a white smock read some gibberish out of a book, and I was glad to scuttle out a deadly dull place as quick as I could. I just waited long enough to see 'em put the old 'ooman in the ground, and then I was off on the road; and I'd not go again into such a dark, stifling hole for all the old 'ooman as ever was hatched." If the problems connected with the industrious poor are almost overwhelming to the mind of the statesman and philanthropist, what may be said of those who have lost all desire for work, and whose roving habits renders treatment by church or state next thing to impossible?