

# MOVING PICTURES SUGGESTED TO END THE TRAMP EVIL



THE BEGINNER



A TRAMP OF A YEAR



A CONFIRMED TRAMP



IN THE LAST STAGE

James Forbes, Hobo Expert, Proposes Also the Equipment of Every Village Police Department and Railroad Station with a Mendicant "Rogues' Gallery" to Help Stamp Out the Nuisance.

**T**HE man who knows most about the tramps' ways, the tramp language, or "slanguage," who knows most about the tramp problem in this country, and is at once the tramp's most sympathetic friend and his bitterest enemy, is James Forbes, Director of the National Association for the Prevention of Mendicancy of this city. The subject of tramps has been a life study with him.

Mr. Forbes declares that there are certainly 250,000 tramps and professional beggars in this country, if not many more; that the number is growing every year in spite of the heavy killing and maiming of vagrants every year by the railroads. The jails and penitentiaries are being filled with them, he says, as they move on down grade from begging and petty thievery to the crimes of arson, safe-breaking, and murder. Mr. Forbes declares that the army of trampdom is recruited by thousands every year from the homes of respectable and often well-to-do parents in small towns. Boys respond to the call of the road, the call of the world and of adventure, and soon they are the slaves of "kid-snaring" professional tramps, made to beg, and beaten until their spirit is gone.

Mr. Forbes has worked out a remedy for this tramp evil. For years he has been thinking over it, evolving it piece by piece, and now he is ready to tell how this social cancer may be healed. His plan may take some little time to work itself out, and a little money, but he declares it will be effective. Briefly, this plan is to hold up to the boy of the country the forbidding picture of tramp life as it actually is, not as the boy seeking adventure imagines "life on the road" to be. The tramp as a "horrible example" is to be shown in every railroad town and hamlet in America by means of moving pictures and by publications. This is by way of prevention.

The veteran tramp and beggar is also to be dealt with. Every railroad is to be furnished with a tramp rogues' gallery, so is every village police department, and the professional beggar is to be made to live hard if he is a criminal, and if he is not, beyond petty offences, he is to be sent to State institutions where he can be taught to earn a decent living in a decent way. But Mr. Forbes tells his own story.

"Tramp recruits," he said yesterday, "are obtained from every part of our country, and from many walks in life. A majority of the boys, for the most part sons of fairly prosperous citizens; mechanics, store-keepers, agents of one sort or another. Often the parents are comparatively wealthy and occasionally sons of rich men take to the road. It follows that boys from homes ranging from comfortable to prosperous and even luxurious, possess some education, are in varying degree imaginative, and usually prepossessing in manner.

"There are, of course, many boys, too, recruited to the road each year who come from poor homes, are the sons of poor widows, runaways from institutions, derelicts from factory towns, or the cities, where they can obtain or hold employment because of incapacity, misconduct, or again factory boys who may be in a way to become industrially competent, but who seek the road during a strike, lock-out, or shut-down, which has thrown them idle.

"The boys apart, we must remember, too, that young men in numbers mounting up into the thousands annually drift into trampdom as a result of industrial depression or dispute, or from personal causes often having their root in some fault, weakness, or vice in the individual which renders it difficult, if not impossible, for him to find and retain employment. Many such recruits come from the ranks of transient working men of the 'hobo' type who gradually become habituated to the tramp life and atmosphere and some day throw in their lot finally with tramps.

"However, so far as men, whether young or of middle age, are concerned, it seems fair to assume that, no matter what the impelling force, they may be regarded as knowing what they are doing or at least as being able to hold their own while on the road and retrieve themselves from it as opportunity may afford.

"With the boys it is different, and it is with the recruiting of boys to the road that we are primarily concerned. We have noted that a majority (this is certain, perhaps one would be justified in saying a large majority) of such boys come from good homes and possess a fair education together with the pleasing address and good manners natural to such antecedents.

"Those sympathetic to the development of the juvenile mind will readily apprehend wherein lies the lure of the road for such boys. Adventure is what they crave and there usually appearing no other mode of realization possible, the road enticements their youthfulness, exhausts it, and either kills them outright or flings them maimed physically, or mentally, any event, into the cities to live by beggary.

"But as to the connection. How are these boys, resident in good homes, apprised that there is a life of the road and converted to its service? The answer lies in the fact that wherever the railroad runs there goes the tramp. No corner of the country having rail connection is free from him, and nearly every adult tramp is an active recruiting agent for the "road" for the very good reason that he prefers to live without even the labor of begging and is but living up to the code of his kind in "snaring a kid" to be his apprentice and drudge. "Nor do fidelity to code and individual laziness or the universal desire of man to

subjugate some one to his service explain the tramp's action in full.

"A kid is a money-getter the world over, while a burly is apt to get the boot," so an experienced tramp summed up the situation. In other words, a smooth-faced youth can, and does, habitually succeed in arousing sympathy and aid where the adult tramp not only fails but is liable to summary treatment.

"So we understand why each and every adult tramp is always on the lookout for a 'good kid,' if not already provided with one.

"The watering tank common to almost every railroad point where trains, and particularly freight trains, stop for water, to transfer freight, or "lay over" for passenger trains to pass, is the common meeting ground for the tramps recruiting for the road and the boys in search of adventure.

"There is hardly a town, village, or hamlet in the country which, having rail connection, does not daily have its quota of boys who haunt the local railroad yards, round houses, repair shops, signal towers, and water tanks, hungry for the sights and sounds of the railroad, which in the average small city or town is apt to dominate psychologically to a large degree the life of a quiet place, which has its link with the busy outside world only by means of the railroad.

"From the young schoolboy in knickerbockers to the half-grown youth perhaps finished at school and facing the prospect, as he sees it, of life-long employment in a small town, with no chance to 'see the world,' there is abundant material ready to the tramp. Tramp traditions have raised the 'snaring of a kid' to a science, but underlying all the tramp enjoyery of wonders to be seen, cities visited, freedom enjoyed, distances traversed, lies the predisposing attraction in the youth's dreams of adventure, common to all minds, and apparently debarr'd from realization except by way of the 'road.'

"It is perhaps needless to dwell here at any length upon the early disillusion which befalls the boy adventurer. Once away from the protection of his home he is at the mercy of his tramp master, and should he show any disposition toward disobedience he is beaten, cuffed, and abused until his complete subjection is attained.

"Ashamed to return home even if it were possible for him to escape from men skilled in railroad travel and keeping him under strict observation, and afraid to attempt to get away from them and pursue his travels alone—knowing he will promptly be appropriated to the service of the first adult tramp he meets who may need a drudge—the boy's spirit leaves him and he quickly, in most cases, becomes habituated to the tramp life and is lost to home, friends, and society.

"When we look further and note the heavy percentage of casualties by accidents in wrecks and in the riding of freight and passenger trains by tramps, and the losses by disease among men and boys exposed to the hardships incident to life on the road, hardships rendered the more deadly by the almost universal abuse of liquor common to tramps, we

may begin to appreciate the extent of the recruiting inevitable to fill the ranks of the tramp army.

"How, then, to cope with the evil at its source? By a propaganda of education along popular lines, bringing home to boys and to their parents the real life of the road and the physical and moral dangers characteristic of life.

"To this end we propose, if successful in raising the funds necessary to begin operations, to put several field secretaries at work, equipped with all the material in pictures and text necessary for the effective operation of traveling exhibits. Our plan is to divide the country into four principal sections—northeast, southeast, northwest, and southwest, and

actual facts of tramp life, and by original photographs of tramps of all ages and grades show the real story from start to finish. We have on hand a great mass of material suitable for such lectures as would accompany the pictures and should expect the field work to be fruitful, not alone in preventing the recruiting of boys to the road, but in arousing public interest in the whole question of tramps and tramping and possible preventives of the evil which must still exist for some years to come, even if all sources of new supply be cut off. In this connection we should expect to initiate in every State a campaign for the establishment of a State farm colony to which habitual tramps and beggars might be



James Forbes, Expert in Hobo Sociology.

put one good man into the field in each section. Starting from central cities, as, for example, New York, Atlanta, Chicago, or St. Louis, we contemplate showing the exhibit and lecturing in all railroad towns of the section involved, and probably maintaining permanent exhibits in the central cities serving as bases.

"In the field work we should rely largely upon moving pictures showing the

committed for terms as high as three years and in an atmosphere of goodwill and practical training have an opportunity to work out their salvation by rational employment in agriculture.

"Coincidentally, we should make special efforts to win the active co-operation of municipal and railroad police departments to the end that professional tramp beggars, especially those with the repu-

putation of 'kid snarers,' be brought to justice wherever possible. With the various charitable associations in the territories covered we should endeavor to arrange for a wider, more sympathetic attitude and practical interest in the 'tramp boys' whom awakened police departments, public or private, would bring in from off the cars or from begging in the streets or on passenger trains.

"Such boys would be held temporarily by the police while the local charitable society made inquiries as to the location of their homes, the willingness of his parents to take him back, and their ability to do so. A good deal of money could be judiciously expended in the sending home of such boys as had homes and for whose reception our agents or other charitable agencies might arrange, even sending a good man along to see the boy reached home safe and to help advise over the difficult first period of readjustment.

"Granted the necessary funds, too, and we would publish a quarterly or perhaps monthly bulletin containing the photographs and records (with as full biographical and personal descriptions as possible) of notorious professional tramps who should be driven from the road and who, perhaps, may be proper subjects for arrest and extradition as kidnappers.

"In this bulletin, too, we should print pictures and descriptions of missing boys who, it is suspected, have been deceived on the road and whose parents or guardians seek their return.

"Much valuable related matter as to

tramp methods might well be published in such a bulletin, which, widely circulated among the police departments of the entire community, both public and private, and among charitable societies, clergymen, and other interested persons, should be of decided value.

"Is it not worth the \$30,000 necessary to give the plan a year's trial? One would think that any great railroad would gladly itself appropriate such sum at once much to relieve the tramp situation on its lines as to conserve to useful pursuits and gainful occupations the youthful citizens domiciled along its right of way who, if normally developed, are potential contributors to the railroads' prosperity.

"Apart from the moral side of the question, tramps constitute an intolerable nuisance to the railroads generally, as is amply evidenced in data collected by myself some years ago in the form of replies from various railroad Presidents and general managers as to the tramp situation.

"One great road in the Northwest is committed by its President, a man famous in the annals of railroading, to the statement that in his road's territory it is common for bands of armed tramps to take physical possession of entire trains, intimidate, assault, rob, and sometimes kill trainmen, and play havoc with train operation generally.

"Quite a number of railroad operators bore testimony to the assaults upon trainmen by armed tramps, while the break-

ings of car seals and looting freight cars, burning holes in car floors, lighting fires in winter, tampering with signals, and sometimes switches and rails, were matters of everyday occurrence upon most roads.

"Some of your readers may remember the long series of outrages by tramps upon the New York Central lines in Pennsylvania a few years ago when for months hardly a day passed but some signal-tower was broken into and the operator robbed and beaten.

"In tramp circles it is understood that this series of outrages was by way of revenge by tramps for alleged harsh treatment by railroad men of some of their number.

"One road reported killing so many tramps in accidents that it was necessary to maintain a common burying ground to receive the victims of such fatalities. All the roads, with few exceptions, comment on the fact that the tramps are a hospital care and operations (usually amputations) upon tramps injured while 'beating their way.'

"Even though we may be unable to get the money for the four national sections this year, it is essential that 'Stepping-Stone House' be established as the first social laboratory in research work and salvage among such young men and boys as are sinking into the tramp and mendicant life and may perhaps still be reclaimed. In any event we plan to establish 'Stepping-Stone House' as the first of the four social nuclei necessary for our plan.

"Here we shall assemble all necessary material for the campaign, the while carrying on active personal salvage work among our people. The sort of old-fashioned private house best suited to our purposes may be obtained for not more than \$2,000 a year rent, and it may even be that some kindly disposed man or woman reading this may place at our disposal such a house rent free. Or, again, that some such kindly disposed man or woman may guarantee our work a trial-year's rent. For a gift of \$5,000 we can rent and equip the house for a year's service, and once having such opportunity for service, the remaining fifteen thousand dollars would surely follow upon the basis of work accomplished.

"One word in conclusion: The boys are worth saving, we must all admit, even though life on the road led to no worse than to make them beggars and petty thieves, which is bad enough. But an incident just occurred in the work of the day reminds me that not alone are boys decoyed to tramping and its allied arts, begging and thieving, but that they are trained, should they fall in with the yeggman or 'hard-boiled people,' for safe blowers, and thus recruit the most desperate criminal class in America today.

"Though the Comprachico (L'homme qui rit) may be no more, and his torturing of kidnapped children into marketable commodities a thing of the past, the tramp 'jockey' or 'kid-man' of today habitually applies torture to the attainment of his ends. It is an established standard known to all those who come into close contact with tramps and their boys that the latter invariably have on the forearms or ankles burned scars usually of the size of a dollar or half dollar, and made by the application of potash or lye. These scars, readily excited into sores by carbolic acid, when necessary, are displayed by the boy in his begging expeditions to gain sympathy for him and substantiate his tale of being out of work through accident.

"Sometimes a boy will have a dozen or more of such sores, colloquially termed 'bugs.' Those we have been speaking about are termed 'lye bugs,' and there is another kind which raises a large blister to simulate a scald and is known as a 'scalding bug,' being made by the application of cantharides.

"The way to prevent mendicancy, charitable imposture, and all the frightful butcheries of the road and its logical outcome in heavy burdens upon our citizens for the maintenance of public charitable and correctional institutions, Potter's fields, and the like is to prevent the recruiting of boys to the road."



A Railroad "Rogues' Gallery."