

Book Reviews

By John Philip Morris

Many men have written fascinating tales of vagabondage, many more men have lived such tales but to have both lived such a tale and then to have transcribed it for the pleasure of others is the privilege of but few.

Harry Kemp's TRAMPING ON LIFE is such a book. It is autobiography, of course, and true as autobiography can be and yet probably contains the falsehoods that autobiographies must contain, for it is absolutely impossible for any of us to tell the exact truth about anything, least of all about ourselves. In fact for some nineteen hundred years the question of what truth really is has never been satisfactorily answered.

At any rate, whether 100 per cent true or only 50 per cent, Harry has achieved one of the most delicious books ever classified as autobiography.

With the exception of Robert Browning, he is the only man I know of who deliberately shaped his whole life towards becoming a poet. As poetry making has never been classed among the more lucrative professions, even when the poet is the best of his generation, Harry Kemp was put to make strange makeshifts to keep the engine working and these make most interesting reading. So while Harry has never reached affluence, money has been the least of his worries. It cannot prove of paramount importance to any man who, with an income of seven dollars a week, will elope with the wife of another.

Harry Kemp was born in a small town in Ohio and spent his boyhood on farms and small Main Streets. Having no mother he was transferred from one relative to another until adolescence found him with his father in New Jersey.

Interested only in poetry, school and factory were twin bores and, following his bookish preceptors, he ran away to sea. Arriving in Australia he ran away from sea and then re-shipped as a cattle tender on a China-bound boat.

After China came the Philippines and then a long tramp across America, stealing rides and books and begging

food and papers and seeing what a jail looked like from the inside.

Then he joined Bernard McFadden in establishing a health colony and next drifted to Elbert Hubbard and East Aurora. Wanting more education he worked his way through school and college on the slimmest of rations and the thickest of hopes.

While in college his poems attracted the attention of Upton Sinclair and, college days over, he seeks his idol and finds—a woman, Mrs. Upton Sinclair. With Shelley and Byron for a background and an urge what could he do but take what was so freely offered? Upton behaved very badly about it according to the code of Kemp and himself and absolutely refused to settle the matter in "the radical way" and let "Harry" and "Hildreth," the modern world "an example of radical love life." Oh no, Upton cast back to the bourgeoisie and instituted bourgeois divorce proceedings.

"Hildreth," however, proved that she was a Radical from Radicalville, a super or Greenwich Village Rad in fact. Before Harry had a chance to see how far seven per goes towards clothing even the dearest woman in the world or Uppie could get the decree she had left Harry for Another.

The book ends in a note of triumph. Harry has lost love but he has gained eternal fame. "Judas" has just been published and the world is waiting to acclaim Mr. Kemp as the greatest poet and dramatist of the age. It is an anti-climax to relate that "Judas" has been out for many years and the world hasn't done a darn bit of acclaiming.

There is one really provoking thing about TRAMPING ON LIFE. Kemp, for fear of libel suits, perhaps, has everywhere altered proper names, even including his own. He goes through the book as Johnnie Gregory while Elbert Hubbard becomes Roderick Spalton and Upton Sinclair, Penton Baxter. It is often foolish and unnecessary. On page 249 we read of Emma Goldman in the abstract, while on Page 285, when she steps into the narrative, it is as Emma Silverman. Perhaps, however, Harry was right as he is not at all complimentary to the Greasy Fra and some of the others.

Unless, however, I have convinced you that the book is more than worth while, I have failed in this review. It is without question the most intri-

guing book of the season. Start on page 1 and you must read on until you have finished the 438 pages of pure pleasure it contains. Then you wish that Harry had had a longer life, although it would be impossible for him to have had a fuller or a more interesting one.

JOHN PHILIP MORRIS.

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