

Remarkable Experience of a Business Man Disguised as a Tramp



BEWARE OF THE'D



AT THE SIGN OF THE O.X



ANNOUNCING TO HIS BROTHERS THE FACT THAT MONEY IS GIVEN HERE



WILLIAM A. GLEASON WHO POSED AS A TRAMP.



NO WORK, NO COIN, NO FOOD WHERE THE MALTESE CROSS APPEARS

WILLIAM A. GLEASON, a prominent young business man of Torrington, Connecticut, and county director of the Total Abstinence League, after attending the thirty-fifth annual convention of the Total Abstinence and Benevolence Society held recently in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., packed his full-dress suit, "biled" shirts, patent leather pumps, sixty-seven neckties and all the rest of the wardrobe which goes to make a man of a fellow, and donning a pair of down-at-the-heels shoes, shabby trousers, negligee shirts, a slouched hat, much the worse for wear, and tying a rubber cape in a striped towel, started forth as a bona fide hobo to study the world from the tramp's view point and to test his friends.

He carried a little money in his pockets until he reached New York, for he believed he would need it there to carry out his scheme successfully. Tramping steadily through Pennsylvania, nothing worthy of comment happened. Gleason was on his way northward to his home in Torrington, Connecticut, and from New York city he tells his own story.

Arriving in New York on Saturday afternoon, I immediately made the acquaintance of a policeman, to whom I told the plan of my next week's travel, and inquired of him what I should do in order to cover the vagrancy laws, for I did not care to find myself in the arms of the law. He was doubtful of my sincerity at first and seemed to consider the advisability of "taking me up" at once. Here I was thankful for the small roll of bills with which I had provided myself. A quick exchange of one of them was made and the blue-coat's confidence gained. He regarded me as a harmless fool, and after trying to dissuade me, gave me the information I had first requested. He told me to have a supply of pencils or shoe-strings along with me, and when I asked for food to mention work, and to also offer to sell my pencils. This would keep me out of the beggar's category and away from the clutches of the law. After receiving these pointers, I made the necessary purchases and planned to start on Monday morning.

So, on the day in question I dressed myself in my hobo rig, placing my good clothes and my money in a suit case and expressing it home. This left me in New York in a tramp's disguise and without a copper and only my pencils and shoe-strings and the possible charity of the world between me and starvation. I tried to work myself into the spirit of the thing, but somehow I couldn't forget that I had my Y. M. C. A. membership card with me and good credit waiting for me at the end of my proposed journey. Cheerfully I sallied forth. Walking across town, a short distance, I sold a pair of shoe-strings, took the elevated to wherever it went, which proved to be the Bronx. It was no new experience for me to mingle with well-dressed, self-respecting and respected citizens, to be accepted as one of them, but it was a delightfully new experience for me to board a trolley filled with this class of people, I being clad in hobo attire and looking the picture of a "no-account." There was a difference, and I soon learned it. It was interesting on this side to see how the people would avoid sitting anywhere near me. I had a whole seat to myself, and one by one new-comers glanced at me and gave the vacant place beside me the go-by. One lady was, however, obliged to occupy

the seat or stand, owing to a crowded car, but as soon as there was a vacant seat on the opposite side she moved over.

In the neighborhood of the Bronx are a number of cars bound for various places, so after making a sale of a pencil, I sought one going in the direction of South Norwalk, that being on the line I had mapped out for myself. It was my desire to learn how a tramp was treated in a big city, how he could "beat" his way on the cars and, finally, leaving the city, how he could work his way from town to village picking up a bite wherever he could. I found New Yorkers inclined to be generous, if they considered me at all. Most of the time they were in too big a rush to even look at me, let alone spare valuable minutes to listen to a hard-luck story. Work is plentiful in that city, there are lots of odd jobs to be picked up, but a fellow has to be wide awake, alert and up to snuff in a business way to secure one of these jobs.

Panhandling the Conductor

Well, after having sized up the city and its dwellers to my satisfaction, as I said, I boarded a car going in the direction of South Norwalk. I was unlucky in my selection of a destination, for

I struck a line on which no transfers are issued—that is, none which would aid me.

I paid my first fare and rode along in comfort for about thirty-five minutes, then the conductor came to collect again. I being penniless, told my story and was requested to pay or move along. I refused to do either, and after a short conversation with the conductor, I was gently (?) and bodily put off the car. Walking down the street, a little way, I observed another car coming, and I, with my suit-case, which consisted of a small rubber cape tied up in a red bandanna handkerchief, made a flying leap for it and landed safely. When the conductor came for my fare, I told him I had no money, but that I was anxious to reach South Norwalk to release a man who had been arrested on a charge for which I was guilty. The conductor eyed me, grinned good-naturedly and permitted me to ride, but told me that I would have to get off when it came time for another fare. The time seemed very short when I again landed in the road. Being a little tired of riding, I walked quite a distance over the good country roads, and on the way I sold three pencils. From the last man to whom I sold I inquired the fare to South Norwalk, and being informed that it was fifteen cents, I decided to ride in. It was

only a few minutes before I saw a car coming. I stepped to the side of the track and beckoned to the conductor. He gave me a thorough looking over and decided to keep on going. I decided that the next car would stop for me, so at its approach, I remained in the centre of the track, waved my red bandanna handkerchief as though something serious had occurred. The car came to a halt, I jumped aboard, told the motorman that nothing was wrong, showed my three nickels and rode to South Norwalk, where I intended to spend the night.

Not being familiar with the sign language of the professional hobo, I was obliged to judge a house by its architecture. The sign language of the tramp is a very remarkable and complete method of communication.

Hobo Marks on Dwellings

As I wandered through South Norwalk, I noticed that many houses, gate posts and carriage blocks bore crosses of different shapes. I had heard of this sign language of the hobo, but had never before had an opportunity to master its mysteries.

In my ignorance I walked to the back door of a house which bore a plain X on the wall, quite close to the gate. It was good luck which directed my selection. The mistress was a just woman, and upon my telling her I was hungry for work as well as for food, she set me to sawing wood. It's no fairy tale that this is the usual task given to Wandering Willies. I sawed much wood while I studied human nature on my eight day's tramp. I wasn't always treated as well, however, as I was at my first stopping place. Here, after having sawed for about half an hour, I was given a first-class meal, served

nice and on whole dishes. I remembered the shape of that cross.

Upon leaving the house I got in with a "prof," one of the regular roaders, and he, not suspecting me of any double purpose, told me the story of the sign language and pledged me one of their bands.

A simple, honest cross anywhere about the place means "work and good food." That's just one cross to bear you see—the work. Two ditto crosses mean work and poor food. Catch the idea?

A Maltese cross means "keep away, no food, no money, no anything but abuse." My friend said to me innocently: "Do you know how to make a Maltese cross?" I said: "How?" by way of hearing what more he had to say, and he replied: "Pull its tail. And that's how to make the people who live with the Maltese cross, pard, pull their bells and ask for work. Savvy?"

I said that I understood and begged for further enlightenment in this interesting language. I was told that an O and an X meant no work, but food. At the sign of the OX is a good place to stop. D means dog and danger, V means money; B means bad fare. That is about all there is to this comprehensive language, but it fills the bill—and the tramps.

Sometimes I found it very difficult to secure accommodations for the night, even with money in my pocket. My hobo rig was against me.

After a twenty-cent bed, I purchased a sandwich and a cup of coffee and called at the office of a physician with whom I am well acquainted. I was sorry he was not at home, but the housekeeper, also with whom I was acquainted, answered the call. I tried to sell her a pencil to help me along, but while she looked very sad over my hard-luck tale, I could not touch her pocketbook, and the open door seemed to trouble her. I wasn't asked in, nor was I pressed to come again. This was my first experience with friends, and it stimulated my ideas with the result of awakened sympathies for the poor, down-at-the-heels cusses.

After that call I started on my walk to Bridgeport, and a beautiful place that is for the improvement of walks. I luckily secured a ride for a few miles from a kind-hearted expressman—he had experienced rough times himself—and reached Bridgeport about 2 o'clock. My appetite was worrying me, so I stopped at the first house I came to. Strange to say, this was the first encounter I had with a man, and he was not at all agreeable. He called me a bum in a gruff tone and told me to get on at a double-quick or he would soon show me how. In a few minutes I was at another back door, where I had better luck. The lady was going out to spend the afternoon, and consequently could give me no work, but accommodated me with a light lunch. This promised to prove the most interesting part of my journey. I had taken good care to have the news of a banking disaster in which I was supposed to have suffered—circulated, and of course

I kept dark about my plan to test the treatment of a tramp.

I would go to a door, make my best bow and ask for work. Then would pour forth a stream of comments, the nature of which was enough to arouse the ire of any American. Many times the door would be slammed in my face.

The bad food I received was enough to give dyspepsia to a whole town. Spoiled meats, bread and cake so stale it was not fit to be eaten, all this and much more of like kind was handed grudgingly to me over the back-door sill in payment of an hour's honest labor. And it was supposed to be given in the spirit of charity!

In Waterbury I saw many familiar faces, faces which flushed with embarrassment when their owners saw me. Only four out of about fifty persons whom I knew well enough to borrow a ten spot from before I donned hobo attire spoke to me and they gave me only a quick, short nod after glancing hurriedly around to see whether anyone was looking.

I was jeered at along the road by the youngsters, who sang after me, "Any rags, any bottles, any bones to-day" in high glee. It afforded me much amusement, but I couldn't feel that were my status what my appearance indicated, these discourteous remarks would have wedged the iron into my soul. Remember, I was tramping as a fellow down in his luck but willing to work, not as a mere lazy hanger-on, a professional roadster.

At the Campanile station the agent, who knows me very well, was just hanging out the mail pouch as I passed. He hailed me pleasantly enough, but stood guard over his bag in a very aggressive manner until I was well on my way again. Some day I'll step around there when I am clothed in proper attire and that agent and I will have a chat which I hope will improve his manners.

In Torrington I was given many eye-openers. From the people to whom I thought I could look for at least a word or two of friendly sympathy I received the worst possible treatment, and from those who could ill afford to give a fellow being a substantial lift I received nothing but kindness and many invitations to share their all. It was a great experience. I guess one week of it was about enough for me. It gave me some rather unpleasant ideas about my fellowman. It's grab for yourself and let the other man go hang in most cases where prosperity shines. I can't say that the trip broadened my sympathies for the professional tramp, but I do realize how hard it is for a fellow down in his luck to rise.

To Test Milk

A simple but safe way to test the purity of milk: A well-polished knitting needle is dipped into a deep vessel of milk and immediately withdrawn in an upright position. If the sample is pure some of the fluid will hang to the needle, but if water is added to the milk, even in small proportions, the fluid will not adhere to the needle.