

PORTLAND, OREGON, SUNDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 4, 1903

## PUTTING THE TRAMP OUT OF BUSINESS

### Will Industrial Labor Colonies Solve the Problem?

**C**AN the United States put the tramp out of business? This question has been asked thousands of times, and the answer thousands of times has been that the nation is helpless.

Today more than 500,000 tramps—in a proportion to the total population higher than one tramp for every 200 people—constitute 500,000 dangerous interrogations.

What can every 200 people—men, women and children—do to eliminate the drain and the dread and the oftentimes terrible menace existing in that one tramp who moves—now so furtively, again so murderously—through the forty homes that house their families?

Can they, having failed utterly hitherto, do anything?

They can, quite as readily as the sober common sense of Switzerland has enabled the Swiss to clear the whole land of vagrants with benefit to the country, benefit to the people and benefit, most of all, to the tramps.

Industrial colonies of continental Europe have solved the problem as signally as the steamboat solved the problem of ocean navigation after untold generations, during which all mankind, as its tramps are now, was at the mercy of the most vagrant winds that blow.

**T**HE naked fact that there are 500,000 vagrants in the United States is impressive enough to be thoroughly disheartening.

But it is not merely that one-half of one per cent. of the population, withdrawn from productiveness, persist as a burden upon the backs of all the rest. They become a source of direct injury to all other classes of citizens.

Their damage to the property of the railroads alone amounts to \$25,000,000 a year. That is, every one of that atavistic horde of 500,000 is responsible, on the average, for \$50 worth of damage to railroads annually—practically \$1 a week apiece.

Within five years they proved such a source of danger to themselves in the course of their railroad trespassing that 23,964 of them were killed and 25,236 were injured.

Variou railroads are compelled to maintain private graveyards in which to bury the corpses of tramps whose recklessness has caused their death.

Nobody has yet been able to estimate how many railroad men have been injured and murdered by tramps, and only guesses can give an idea of the total of destruction of private property, of larceny, murder and assaults that are annually to be set down to the account of the American tramp.

#### DEPRAVES YOUNG MEN

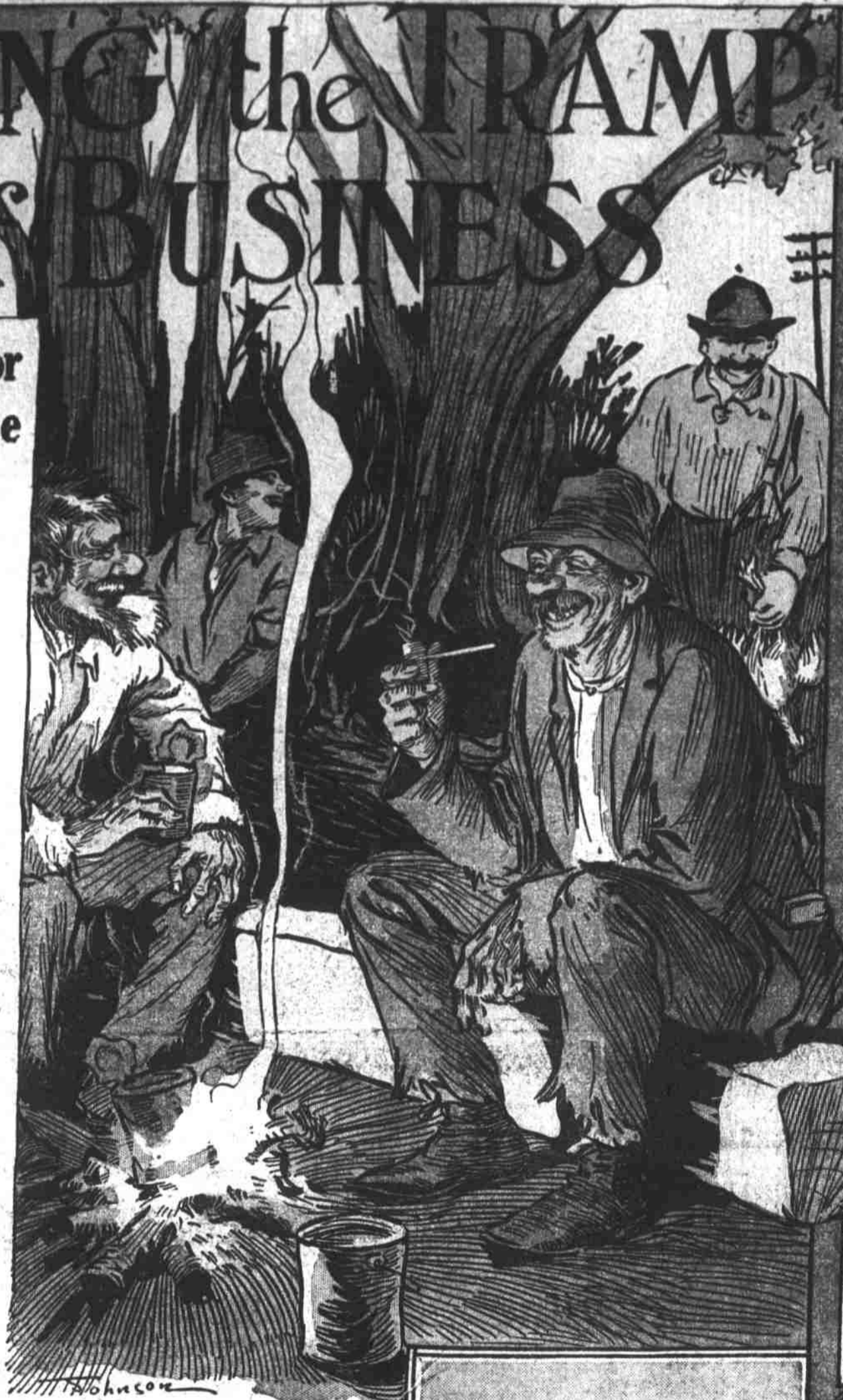
Worse than all, three-fourths of that idle, wandering army is composed of young men between the ages of 18 and 21, 50 per cent. of whom, it is conservatively estimated, are being steadily transformed into so many human wolves, depending solely upon their cunning and their strength to wrest a living from the society they detest, expensive at all times and dangerous most of the time.

So far as any authentic records go, there is, among the whole 500,000 vagrants of the land, just one who has proved himself worth his salt in the aimless pursuit of his purposeless profession.

He is known to railroads the country over as A No. 1. Nobody knows any other name of his. Born in California 35 years ago, he was 11 years old when his teacher gave him one sound whipping and a note to his father which assured him of another.

He ran away and he has been running ever since. He travels in clothes good enough for a traveling salesman, worn under a brakeman's jumper and overalls. He is intelligent, honest, expert in carving, speaks four languages and makes his way almost unopposed over nearly every railroad in the country.

When a trainman who doesn't know him tries to put him off the train he need usually do no more than appeal to the conductor. If the whole crew fail to recognize his prerogatives, he haughtily tells them to wire to the terminal offices.



He has earned his transportation during long years of vagrancy, during which his timely warnings of conditions of tracks, rolling stock and other features of railroading have saved the lines accidents that might have cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. He is now a sort of unlicensed, but highly valued, general inspector of roadbeds and rolling stock.

But he is the only one. All the rest wage a perpetual war on the roads they beat; and every little while the continual series of single combats is enhanced by a pitched battle such as occurred recently in New York or as happens when the train crews out West throw off 100 tramps in a run of as many miles.

Now is approaching the time of the year when the farmers of the nation—who suffer most from the tramp in petty larcenies, fires that are little short of arson and assaults that bring out whole countryside in vengeance—enjoy the first relief from their national nuisance that they get in months.

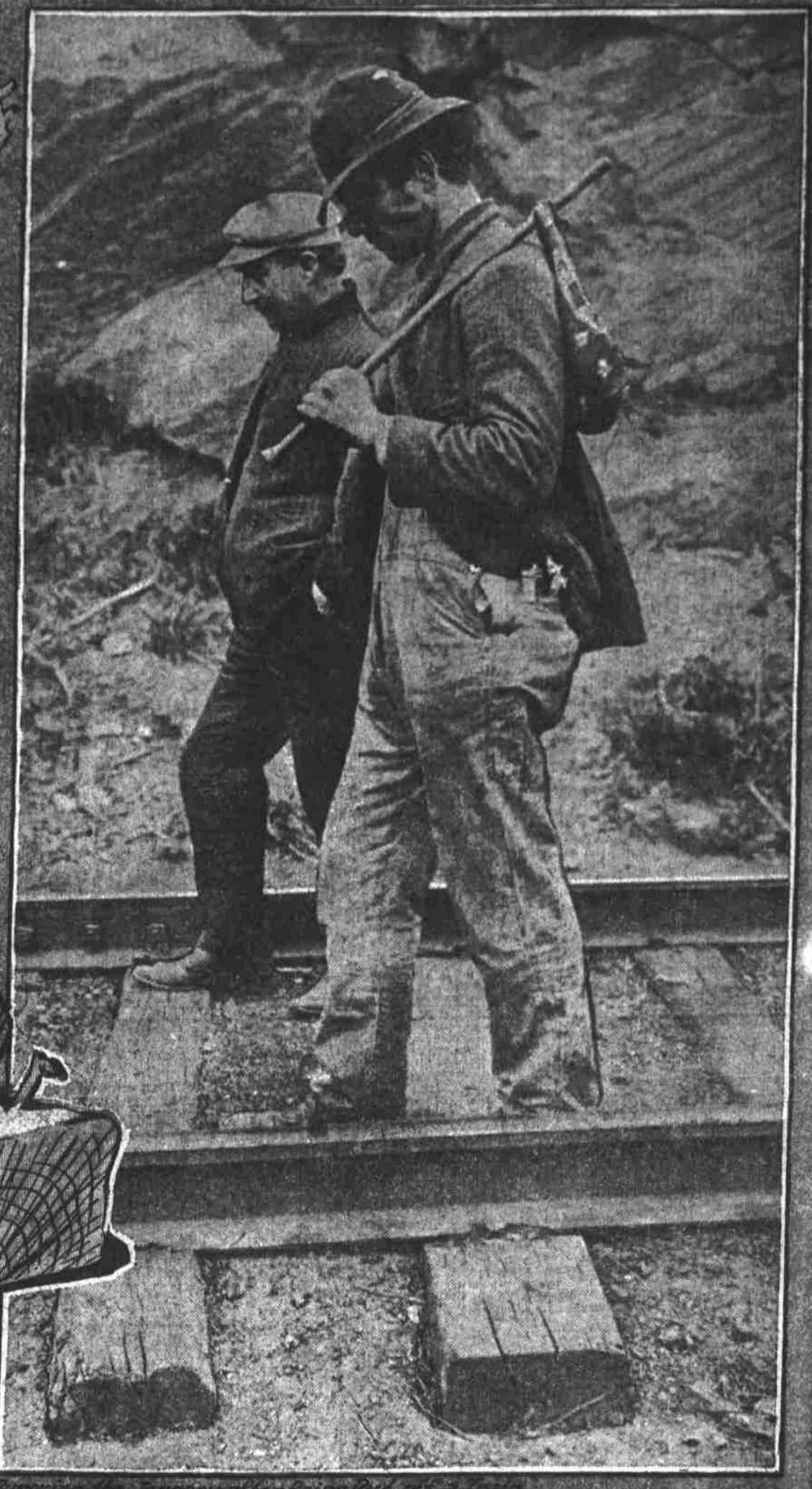
With the approach of the winter the armies of tramps betake themselves to the cities, where the police stations, poorhouses and jails are suddenly overcrowded and the streets experience a sudden increase in the number of highway robberies.

Yet it would be a mistake to suppose that all tramps are either criminal or irredeemable. Experts agree that society itself, with its almost culpably indiscriminate charity on the one hand and its inanely inefficient penal systems on the other, is more to blame than the tramp.

He may take to the road in a spirit of adventure which is innocent enough of all evil design; but society confirms him in it by feeding him so long as he chooses to beg and helps turn him into a thief and thug by sentencing him to prison terms that are long enough to brand him with criminality, but too short to break him of the habits of vagrancy.

Sooner or later, if the tramp life be persisted in, the most industrious of mechanics, who has set forth afoot to find employment, will end by being the habitual loafer, all the more dangerous wherever he goes because he possesses the brains and the technical skill to handle tools well.

These men are not tramps or hoboes—at first; they have every worthy claim to help from any community. But if they get enough help and too little work, it is a foregone conclusion that they, like millions of their predecessors, will end by being hoboes and not in-



and vast lack of sentimental gush. Edmond Kelly, after years of investigation, tells about it in his monograph, "The Elimination of the Tramp."

The Swiss laws begin by separating the honest unemployed from the thieves, loafers and habitual tramps who make the question so hard to settle here.

The Swiss Intercantonal Union investigates the wanderer, and, if he proves to be an honest workingman seeking employment, issues to him a traveler's relief book, which permits him to travel without being compelled to work in any of the cantons to which the union's rules apply.

Without that means of proving he means business, every vagrant is arrested, wherever found. But he is not necessarily jailed.

He goes to one of two labor colonies—one a forced labor colony, to which all vagrants are committed who are adjudged culpably vagrant; the other a free labor colony for all who are not in any way culpable.

#### NO THIRTY-DAY FOOLISHNESS

There is no thirty-day foolishness about the sentence. Its prime purpose is to cure the vagrant of being a vagabond, and only prolonged residence in one place and continuous occupation at some form of labor can possibly restore the civilized attitude of mind to the victim of man's atavistic tendency to vagabondage.

At the forced labor colony of Witzwil, in Berne, where the work is chiefly agricultural—as it is in all the Swiss colonies in order that the state labor may not be in competition with general labor—the vagrants work as farm laborers side by side with their custodians.

Their jailers therefore do not present the aspect of armed guards; their place of detention has no appearance of a prison or even of a convict pen; their very clothes are such as could be worn by any farm laborer without attracting odious attention.

They are, indeed, not rated as criminals. They are considered simply citizens with bad habits which must be cured, whether they want to be cured or not; and they have to pay for their medicine, work, by producing crops worth more than their keep and wages.

For they get wages—\$1 a month, if they prove worth anything as workmen. When their term is up—it may be in nine months or a year, (CONTINUED ON INSIDE PAGE.)

Resting on a bench from a train trip.

industrious, self-supporting artisans. The tramp problem, differing in no essentials from ours, was attacked in Switzerland—which, by the way, is a real republic like the United States—with a vast lot of common sense