

## [Tramp Poet]

Songs and Rhymes- Work of [?] [?]

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK [????????????????????] Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER May Swenson

ADDRESS 21 1/2 Morton Street, New York City

DATE January 11, 1939

SUBJECT TRAMP POET

1. Date and time of interview During month of December, 1938
2. Place of interview Mr. Kemp's studio, 64 Washington Sq. So.
3. Name and address of informant Harry Kemp, 64 Washington Square So. New York City
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

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SUBJECT TRAMP POET OUTLINE TRAMP POET

1. Ship's Glamour

1. Boyhood Recollections

a. First meeting with a tramp

2. Adolescence

a. The Byron Period

b. Cabin boy on the "Castle"

3. Cattleman on the "South Sea King"

a. "Ship's Glamour"

11. Riding the Rails

1. The "jungles"

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- a. A Hobo Cook
- 2. The "Sallys"
- b. Jerry McConley
- 3. In jail for "burglary"
- a. Cocaine songs
- b. Bible ballads 2 OUTLINE: - CONTINUED
- 4. "Perfection City
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- 7. The Girl that married another Man.
- 111. Wine Cellar
- I. Migration to the Village
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- 3. Radical Movements in Bohemia
- a. Ode to a Nightingale on the 5-Year Plan
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### I. SHIP'S GLAMOUR

“There's one thing dear to both tramps and poets—and that's freedom,” Harry Kemp said. With long-armed gestures, he ranged about the large room as if it were a stage. His lounging robe and carpet slippers gave him the look of a rather youthful Sophocles in a toga. A loop of straw-colored hair fell into his eyes — (his eyes are a distant blue, squinting slightly as if accustomed to strong sunlight.) “As a boy, I always envied tramps their freedom — Never mind the ashtray — just flick it on the floor,” he interrupted himself, — “Floor gets swept once in awhile... Here, wait a minute!” (striding to a shelf over the corner sink) “I'll make us some tea.” He filled a kettle with water and set it on an electric burner on the floor.

Kemp's studio at 64 Washington Square South is a large bare place which looks like a deserted ballroom, the archway at one end, boarded up between two pillars; two high windows, also boarded up, at the other end, converted into bookshelves; in one corner, an army cot behind a screen; some boards resting on trestles serve as a work table, which is heaped with papers, files and writing materials — the evidence of a novel — his latest work in progress. The floor is bare, as are the high, white-washed walls. The front windows face the Square, a patch of green that is solace to the eye, though decked with 4 scrawny city trees. A poet, who is also a man of action, must have space, and light, and room enough to stride in, even when constrained to indoors...

“Freedom is the one God I worship,” Harry Kemp proclaimed, kneelin beside the tea-pot. “Oh, I'm afraid I've let too much tea fall in—” A half-package of tea had slipped into the pot, while Harry talked. “Never mind, we like it strong— yes?”

“While it's steeping, here's a ballade of mine—something I wrote the other day:”

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(... A BALLADE OF FORMER TRAMP-DAYS) The cars lay on a siding through the night;  
The scattered yard lamps winked in green and red; I slept upon bare boards with small  
delight,— My pillow, my two shoes beneath my head; As hard as my own conscience was  
my bed; I lay and listened to my own blood flow; Outside, I heard the thunder come and  
go And glimpsed the golden squares of passing trains, Or felt the cumbrous freight train  
rumbling slow; And yet that life was sweet for all its pains. Against the tramp the laws are  
always right, So often in a cell I broke my bread Where bar on bar went black across my  
sight; On county road or rockpile ill I sped Leg-chained to leg like man to woman wed, My  
wage for daily toil an oath, a blow; I cursed my days that they were ordered so; I damned  
my vagrant heart and dreaming brains That thrust me down among the mean and low  
— And yet that life was sweet for all its pains. I crept with lice that stayed and stayed for  
spite; I froze in 'jungles' more than can be said; Dogs tore my clothes, and in a woeful  
plight At many a back door for my food I pled Until I wished to God that I was dead.... My  
shoes broke through and showed an outburst toe; On every side the world was all my foe,  
Threatening me with jibe and jeer and chains, Hard benches, cells, and woe on endless  
woe— And yet that life was sweet for all its pains.

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Brighter, in fine, than anything I know Like sunset on a distant sea a-glow My curious  
memory alone maintains The richer worth beneath the wretched show Of vagrant life still  
sweet for all its pains.

The tea was poured into two cracked mugs. Harry sipped it appreciatively, and went on  
talking.

“Books on adventure gave me my first glimpse of the delights of freedom. By the time  
I was eight— my family lived in Youngstown, Ohio, at that time— I had read Stanley's  
“Adventures in Africa” three times in succession, “Polar Explorations” by Kane— and I was

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especially fascinated by a book called, “Savage Races of the World” — I've forgotten the author's name. I revelled and rolled in these books like a colt let out to first pasture.

“Mother was a wonderfully impracticable woman — and she let me do as I pleased. It was really her doing that accounted for my early contagion, of the wanderlust. One day, I came home from school, to find a dirty old yellow-haired tramp established in the ground floor of our house. He had in the first place come to our back door to beg a hand-out. And sitting on the doorstep and eating, he had persuaded my mother that if she would give him a place to locate on credit, he knew a way to clear a whole lot of money. His prospect for making money was the selling of homemade hominy to the restaurants up in town.

“I found him squatted on the bare floor, with no furniture in the room. He had a couple of dingy washboilers, which he had picked up from the big garbage dump near the race tracks. Day in and day out I 6 spent my time with this tramp, listening to his stories of pleasures and adventures of tramp life. You know, I can see him still, wiping his nose on his ragged coat sleeve as he vociferates.... When, one day, he disappeared, leaving boilers, hominy and all behind, I missed his yarns as much as mother missed the unpaid rent!

“As I grew to love reading, I used to take my books into the fields, into the hills, or if it was raining, into the haymow — anywhere out-of-doors. I'd read, while walking— and I liked walking on grass, or on dirt roads, rather than pavements. I'd lie belly-down in grassy ditches, reading Jack London, or Stevenson, or Scott— or I'd lie on the side of a hill in the sun, until I'd be baked a rusty brown— the sun pouring down on the dog-eared pages. While mother kept me in school, I couldn't actually become a 'Kit' or a 'Treasure Island Jim' — so I began imagining myself as such characters— and the next step was writing about them— a sort of wish fulfillment in the face of lack of real adventure. When I was fourteen, I had written two “novels” — both thrillers and in first person— I was the hero of both, of course— and some buccaneer ballads. “Buccaneer Days” was a ballad written when I was about 14. BUCCANEER DAYS There were a host of galleons in the wild sea days of yore

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Whose spacious holds were heavy-wombed with tons of sunny ore. Their admirals, primal-hearted men, who cut men's throats with tears, Wore rainbow sashes round their loins and gold rings in their ears And for the English buccaneers they kept a weather eye As the gaunt and savage wolf holds watch for the eagle from the sky. 7 Oh brave Sir Walter Raleigh, he who crushed the Spanish power, The Great Queen kissed him at the Court and killed him in the Tower, The captains and the admirals, some strangled 'neath the foam, And some were buried with acclaim and elegy at home. Above their final dwelling place a visored figure lies With pious Latin epitaph and hands crossed christianwise. The fleet ships, having known their times, rotted in bight and bay, Or at the bottom of the sea — and naught remains today Of the first great youth of England and the haughty prime of Spain But the broken bolt, a blunderbuss, and a grinning skull or twain.

“I don't know just when the transition occurred, but suddenly, I discovered I'd had my fill of boy-adventure stuff; instead of Kipling and Stevenson, I was reading Byron, Shelley and Keats. Somewhere, I got hold of a copy of Byron's “Hours of Idleness”— and it made a changed man of me. I remember the frontispiece to the book was a portrait of the young Byron, with flowing tie and open shirt. Much as a devout Catholic wears a gold cross around his neck to signify his belief, so with like devoutness, I took to wearing my shirt open at the neck and a loose flowing black tie. And I ruffled my hair in the Byronic style. My writing began to take on a more delicate lyrical tinge, such as: YOUNG MAN'S SONG O Time has lightning in its wing And pleasure is a fragile thing That breaks in cluthing; beauty's face Carries a skull behind its grace: Then where's a better reason why I should love beauty ere it die, Lift brighter torches in the night And seize on joy in time's despite? “

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The poet grew up with the tramp, and the tramp with the poet... When Harry Kemp was sixteen, he ran away to sea, shipping as cabin boy on the German ship, “Castle”, bound for Australia. A ballad of his, “The Endless Lure” celebrates this first real adventures: THE ENDLESS LURE When I was a lad, I went to sea And they made a cabin boy of me. / [(yo?) ho, haul away, my bullies / ) We'd hardly put out from the bay When my knees

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sagged in and my face turned grey; So I went to the captain and I implored That he'd let the pilot take me aboard, And fetch me back to the land again Where the earth was sure for the feet of men... But the captain, he laughed out strong, and said, 'You'll follow the sea, lad, till you're dead; For it gets us all— the sky and the foam And the waves and the wind,— till a ship seems home.' When I shipped as an A. B. before the mast I swore each voyage would be my last... Was always vowing, and meant it too, That I'd never sign with another crew... You tell me 'The Castle' is outward bound, An old sky-sailor, for Puget Sound? 'Too old!'... but I know the sea like a book... Well, I've heard that your 'old man' needs a cook!... Yes, I could rustle for twenty men... So, God be praised, you can use me, then?... Oh, there's only a few years left for me, And I want to die, and be buried at— sea!

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“When I had any spare time, between washing pots, and mopping decks,” Harry relates, “I used to lie in the net under the bowsprit and read. From there I could look back on the entire ship, as she sailed ahead, every sail spread a magnificent sight.”

“One day, while I lay in the sun reading Virgil, there came a great surge of water heaving into the net, drenching me to the skin. I leaped up, bouncing like a circus acrobat in the net, and the book fell out of my hand into the sea. I looked up and saw fully one half of the crew grinning down at me. The first mate stood over a bucket which still dripped water— that showed me where the 'wave' had come from. 'What in hell d'ye thing yer doin?'" he snarled at me. 'I'm — I'm thinking, 'I stammered. 'Thinkin'll never make a sailor out o'yer!' the mate growled. 'Get below decks and clean up the hold!'” And, of course, I 'got'.

“But out of the way of the first mate's boot, I still found time, between peeling spuds and waiting on the captain's table, to experiment with some sea chanteys. Some of these have been published in a volume called “Chanteys and Ballads”. The following are typical: GOING DOWN IN SHIPS Going down to sea in ships Is a glorious thing, Where up and over the rolling waves The seabirds wing; Oh, there's nothing more to my heart's desire Than a ship that goes Head-on through marching seas With streaming bows:

Would you hear the song of the viewless winds As they walk the sky? Come down to sea when the storm is on And the men stand by. Would you see the sun as it walked abroad On God's First Day? Then come where dawn makes sea and sky A gold causeway. Oh, it's bend the sails on the black cross-yards For the day dies far And up a windless space of dusk Climbs the evening star... Now there's gulf on foaming gulf of stars That lean so clear That it seems the bastions of heaven Are bright and near And that, any moment, the topmost sky May froth and swim With an incredible bivouac Of seraphim... O wide-flung dawn, O mighty day And set of sun! O all you climbing stars of God, O lead me on! Oh, it's heave the anchor, walk and walk The capstan 'round — Far out I hear the giant sea's World-murmuring sound! THE [CHANTEY?] OF THE COOK

Dithyramb of a discontented crew. The Devil take the cook, that old, greybearded fellow, Yo ho, haul away! Who feeds us odds and ends and biscuits whiskered yellow. (And the home port's a thousand miles away.) 11 The Devil take the cook, that dirty old duffer, Yo ho, haul away! Each day he makes the captain fatter and bluffer, (But we'll have to eat hardtack for many a day.) The ship-biscuit's mouldy and the spuds we get are rotten, Yo ho, haul away! And the tinned goods that's dished up is seven years forgotten Yo ho, haul away! And each, in his heart, has marked the cook for slaughter, (And it won't do him any good to pray). For the coffee's only chickery half-soaked in luke-warm water, Yo ho, haul away! It's put on your best duds and join the delegation; Yo ho, haul away! We're aft to ask the captain for a decent ration, (And to drop the cook at Botany Bay...) Look here, you cabin boy, what has set you laughin'? Yo ho, haul away! Don't tell us no lies or we'll clout your ears for chaffin' For we're not a lot of horses that can live on hay. What's this you're tellin'! Is it plum duff and puddin'? Yo ho, haul! Why not make it roast beef and let it be a good 'un? For plum duff and rum's not a feast for every day. Oh, it ain't the cook's fault that we eat one day in seven. Yo ho, haul away! It's the owners of the ship— may they never get to heaven (No matter how hard they pray.) It's the owners of the ship that give us meat that's yellow, Yo ho, haul away! And after all the cook's a mighty decent fellow

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(Though we'll have to eat rotten grub for many a day.) O lord up in heaven, when their souls and bodies sever, Yo ho, haul away! May the owners squat in hell gnawing at salt-horse forever And the grub that they give us every day.... Excepting for one thing, O Lord God in heaven, Yo ho, haul away! Don't let them have no plum duff one day in seven, ( All together with great vigor ) But forever and forever and unto eternity the truck that we're fed on every day, Amen! 12 A SAILOR'S LIFE Oh, a sailor hasn't much to brag— An oilskin suit and a dunnage bag. But, howsoever humble he be, By the Living God, he has the sea! The long, white leagues and the foam of it, And the heart to make a home of it, On a ship that kicks up waves behind Through the blazing days and tempests blind. Oh, a sailor hasn't much to love— But he has the huge, blue sky above The everlasting waves around, That wash with an eternal sound. So bury me, when I come to die, Where the full-sailed, heeling clippers ply; Give up the last cold body of me, To the only home that I have — the sea!

In his introduction to the book, “Chanteys and Ballads” Harry Kemp wrote:

“It was in my youth, before my twenties, at a time when I was thoroughly mad for life and whetted keen in every nerve for picaresque adventure and a man's romance at sea, that I went through the varied experiences from which finally sprang these songs and ballads....

“And still the Shine and Heave of the sea itself overpowers me the same as of old— the beloved ocean pouring in tremendously from all its four horizons. Again I feel the way seamen feel and act. Again there comes to me the breathing night full of gulfs of over-leaning stars... those wide dawns and sunsets with no land in sight, that are a spiritual experience in themselves... again there comes to me richly the strange, inarticulate growth of soul and heart and mind that intimate 13 experience of sea and sky brings to them who learn and love the life of those who go down to sea in ships.... again I find the immortal meaning of it all....”

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The Australian voyage over, Kemp joined the crew of a cattle ship, “South Sea King”, bound for China. The ship plied through Southern waters, and for one whole summer, the weather was sullen and stifling hot; the whole craft stank from the pent cattle in her hold, and the crew sweated and fought against the onslaught of vermin; work was heavy and grub was scarce— but out of the whole voyage, Kemp remembers best an incident of cool beauty, such as the sea, with all its relentless hardships, can never fail to invoke:

“It was one unforgettable summer dawn, we were rounding the Cape of Good Hope. It was just before daylight, and foggy. I was on deck, and it looked like that prow was cutting its way like a steel knife through a loaf of cheese, the fog was so dense. Then like a miracle the mists began to lift, veil after veil, and let the sky through. And the sky was a delicate coral color from the rising sun— it was gorgeous—it was like music made visible. We sighted the flag ship “Shaftsbury”, an English vessel, off starboard; and through the slowly dispersing fog, came the faint tinkle of her warning bell. The “South Sea King” answered on a deep-toned dignified note. There was something so poignant and beautiful about the sound, that, standing alone, bundled in my oilskins, on the vacant deck streaked with brine and shining in the sun, I thrilled to wonder and the infinite mysticism of the sea.

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“Ten years later, on a winter night in Provincetown, I was sitting alone in my shack there, reading by kerosene lamp. The windows were sighing against a strong wind. The wind must have touched a row of pots hung on the rough log wall outside, and clinked them together, because out of that dark cold night was born an exact incarnation of the sound of faintly ringing ships bells, invoking for me the identical mood of that brilliant summer dawn at sea off Good Hope.

“I picked up a pencil and wrote the poem “Ship's Glamour”. The first version never needed revision.” SHIP'S GLAMOUR When there wakes any wind to shake this place, This wave-hemmed atom of land on which I dwell, My fancy conquers time, condition, space,— A trivial sound begets a miracle! Last night there walked a wind, and, through chink, It made

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one pan upon another clink Where each hung close together on a nail - Then fantasy put forth her fullest sail; A dawn that never dies came back to me: I heard two ship's bells echoing far at sea! As perfect as a poet dreams a star It was a full-rigged ship bore down the wind, Piled upward with white-crowding spar on spar: The wonder of it never leaves my mind. We passed her moving proudly far at sea; Night was not quite yet gone, nor day begun; She stood, a phantom of sheer loveliness, Against the first flush of an ocean dawn; Then at the elevation of the sun, Her ship's bell faintly sounded the event, While ours with a responding tinkle went. The beauty life evokes, outlasting men, It fills my world from sea to sky again; It opens on me like a shining scroll— The ghost of God that ever haunts the soul!

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11. RIDING THE RAILS I've decked the tops of flying cars That leaped across the night; The long and level coaches skimmed Low, like a swallow's flight. Close to the sleet-bit blinds I've clung Rocking on and on; All night I've crouched in empty cars That rode into the dawn, Seeing the ravelled edge of life In jails, on rolling freights And learning rough and ready ways From rough and ready mates.

Home from China, Harry Kemp paid a visit to his home, his family having moved, in the meantime, to Kansas. He agreed, after much persuasion by his father, to take a turn at High School, but after two years the lure of the wanderer claimed him again. He made a tramp on foot through the Genessee Valley, a copy of Christina Rossetti— his latest love — in his pocket. When fall came, Harry took to riding the rails, and his career as the Hobo Poet began.

“I and my buddy, a short thick-set Scandinavian, were both “gaycats”— that is tramps, not above doing occasional work while in transit on the road. We joined the farm hands during haying time, or picked up a week or two of bed and board in return for harvesting the fall

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crop of fruit. Together, we drifted along the seacoast South to San Diego, back again to Santa Barbara, then sauntered over to San Bernardino — “San Berdu”, as the tramps call it.

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“Chuck Hanson advised me not to worry about lice. 'You'll soon get used to 'em, not feel 'em biting at all.' All you have to do is 'boil up” once in a while’— that is, take off your clothes and boil them, a piece at a time, to kill the vermin. These and other personal chores the well-groomed tramp more or less regularly performs, were usually attended to during stop-overs in camps and jungles. It was here I learned to shave with the aid of a broken bit of whiskey glass. The toughest method of shaving I ever saw, though, was when one old veteran of the road rubbed another's face with the rough side of half a brick!

“Traveling along with us that second summer, was a fat ruddy-faced alcoholic ex-cook—the presiding enius of the gang. On days we were in jungle, he would jumble up all the mixable portions of food, we had begged or stolen, into a big tin washboiler, which he had rescued from the dump outside of town. He stewed up quite a palatable mess which he called 'slum' or 'slumgullion.' For plates we used old tomato cans hammered flat; for knives and forks, our fingers, pocket knives, or chips of wood.

“One afternoon, our leader and cook mysteriously disappeared, and returned rolling a whole barrel of beer into camp, which he had stolen during the previous night from the back of a saloon, and hidden in the nearby bushes. Needless to say, there was a roaring good time in the jungle that night, and several fights.... 'Slopping up' is the tramp term for getting drunk.

“Summer time is no cinch for the bindlestiff, but when the cold days of autumn come along, then his troubles really begin. On chilly nights we put up at the freight yards, crawling into some empty box cars, the more in one car the better, for the animal heat of our bodies served to 17 allay the cold. All of us once in and bedded, the interior of that box car would

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sound like Scotch bagpipes, adrone with snoring, grunting, muttering sleepers. The air, of course, would be sickeningly thick, but to open a side door meant to let in the cold.

“I remember one night, Chuck and I, having been up in town, arrived at our freightyard hotel very late. The gang was asleep to the last man. We quietly crawled in, drew off our shoes and put them under our heads to serve as pillows, and at the same time to keep them from being stolen. (I've met tramps with such deft fingers that they could untie a man's shoes from off his feet, without waking him— and make off with them.) Well, Chuck and I wrapped our feet in newspapers, removed our coats and wrapped them around us. We had just dozed off, when the side door crushed back, and a string of curses shot into our sleepy ears. A half dozen flatfeet stuck their heads in: A shot-gun muzzle sprouting beside every head. 'S' too cold out here,' one big Guy shouted. 'We got a nice warm calaboose waitin for ye— Come on— Out of it!' Sleepy and sullen, we had to catch up our bundles and follow the dicks to the station, to be booked on a charge of vagrancy, and told to hit the road by dawn.

“In my duffle bag, beside my extra pair of socks and a paper sack of bread and cheese or other tidbit, I always carried a small volume or two— usually Shakespeare's Plays. Once or twice, sheriffs who were bent on arresting me because I had no visible means of support, let me go because it awed them to find a tramp reading Shakespeare. 'Shame a clever lad like you bein' a bum...'they'd say.

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“The thing they didn't realize— and that many have failed to realize about me— is that what 'cleverness' I had and have, was acquired by just such means: on rolling freights, in jails, on ships at sea, from jungle buddies, and rough fo'c'sle companions— and that I am gladder for these things than for all that I have since learned from classrooms and from books... in the glory of the long road winding, or the silver rails gleaming, I found much of the same glory that had enthralled me when at sea. I found ample time, while swinging my legs above the hurtling wheels, or lounging on a pile of straw against the wall of an

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'empty', to fashion ballads of the rails. Many of these, however, got lost while in perilous transit from one jungle to another, and on some occasions, being short of newspapers, I had to use my scribbled manuscripts for foot-wrappings during the cold season. Here are two songs written while riding the rails, which somehow were preserved: SONG OF THE FREIGHT CARS The song of the freight-cars Ringing and singing alone the rail - Singing the song of their traffic As they ride like ships in a gale; For ships in the wind lift music Of a song that is all their own - And, chanting down grooves of metal, To a modern symphony grown, The rhythmic cars have voices That the man who rides them knows, While the telegraph poles to their music Go dancing in dervish rows... 'We form caravans never-ceasing That shift across the land! 'Greater than Babylon, Baalbec, And further than Samarkand. 'The cities we link together; More valued the freight we lade Than all that camels carried From ancient cities of trade!' The song of the freight cars ringing And singing along the rail - 'We grapple up sleet-blind summits In the rush of the monstrous gale;

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SONG OF THE FREIGHT CARS - CONTINUED 'We slope down vistaed valleys, Sweep chanting from town to town, 'Bringing larger wealth than the Indies To which poets lent renown.... Greater than kingdoms the cities We serve with the goods they need; And populations surpassing whole empires of old, we feed. 'We could tuck away in our corners all that bygone merchants bought - 'Yes, there's something in just bigness, Though the envious say there's not: Else the fret of the seething ant-hills That the stray heel puts to rout Would equal the still, great ranges That the sunset sits about... The trainmen running along us with the three-ward oath for their feet, And the tramps that hid in our empties know the melodies we repeat,- And the folk that wake at midnight To hark as we rumble by Ken our diapasons of traffic That roll grandly through the sky!' The song of the freight-cars ringing And singing a word of their own That thunders down grooves of metal, To a modern symphony grown!

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FREIGHT-TRAIN FANTASY The tramp didn't care which way he went So long as he went along: He sat on the top of a rolling car; The wheels ground their rhythmic song; From east to west the day was bright; The little towns were fair; The grass and the trees waved in the sun; The hills walked, large in the air; And the engine unwound, as soft as wool, Her wind-billowed smoke, like hair! The herds of cattle moved in the field, The world looked great and kind. Like a skipping calf, the little red caboose bounded on behind. 'Oh. what is that bum a-doin' there, riding so free and high, As plain to sight as a monument That stands up in the sky? 'Go kick him off!' The head shack bade,

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FREIGHT-TRAIN FANTASY [=?] CONTINUED 'His nerve has gone too far!' The engine whistled around a bend; It was shining like a star. 'O, where are you goin' you nervy bum?' The jocose brakie cried - And the answer that that hobo gave Caused the crew to let him ride... The brakie danced back over the boards Because the day was fine. He watched the rails go shining back Like gold laid down in a line. He stopped and tried a wheel with his stick, Just to have something to do. The head shack looked from the cupola; He laughed and said to the crew; 'I guess that bum is a crazy man; And Joe's gone crazy, too! 'Come in here, Joe, an' tell the gang What that Hobo said to you.' 'Oh,' he answered, 'I don't know where I'm bound or where I want to go - 'But, please Mr. Brakeman, don't kick me off - I'm enjoying the landscape so!'

Among other things, Harry tells us, in his career as a tramp-poet, he became acquainted with the 'Sallys'— Salvation Army Stations,— in most of the principle cities of the United States. Here, as in the jungles, he met many picaresque characters— Knights of the Open Road....

“Jerry Mc Cauley was a professional bum. He used to coach the novices in the art of the shrewd use of proffered hospitality. The Salvation Army stations were his main scavenger haunts, and he was well-known at all of them. He would take a bunch of young punks and park them on the 'gospel bench', passing them off as his converts. They were instructed

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to sit for two or more hours and listen to the drone of the preacher, before they would be awarded a bed and supper. For his voluntary activities in soul-saving, Jerry would get a supplementary prize of a pair of shoes, 21 a second-hand overcoat, or a sack of groceries to take with him on the road. He was so ambitious, and his little racket thrived so well that he finally accumulated many extra pairs of old shoes, coats, suits, socks and underwear in various stages of deterioration. These he kept in his 'storehouse' — a tin-sheeted hut on-the waterfront, or under the railway embankment. And when a pal needed a new soup-and-fish, Jerry would supply him in return for a few coins, a pint of rot-gut, a partnership in a sweepstake ticket, or the loan of a woman for the night.

“When finding no immediate use for his booty, he would pawn it, buy liquor, and then there'd be a big time with the boys in the jungles.

“Jerry was a little too fond of the bottle. I remember him during the winter of 1919, when even the missions were tough places to get a handout. He was stranded in Michigan; it was near Christmas; and this time he really needed a pair of shoes. Well, he got hold of them somehow, but he pawned them for booze, and later that night, turned up at another mission, dead drunk, and in his stocking feet. He wept at the feet of the nicked statue of Jesus in the gospel room, repented his sins, and collected another pair of shoes— And would you believe it, the guy hobbled in around daylight, his feet wrapped in burlap, and he was shivering with fever and bung-eyed with the D. T's. He so far forgot himself as to curse Heaven and call the Holy Ghost a few uncomplimentary names. The men of God who ran the Sallys were shocked and indignant. They called the cops and Jerry spent Christmas in a cell— They booked him for disorderly conduct. He had double pneumonia and nearly died. “ Well, Jerry got Hell scared into him that time. He really turned a new leaf. We'd go in to see him, and he'd be kneeling on the cement saying the prayers he had listened to for twenty years in the Sallys—praying 22 in earnest, mind you. ....'God, if only you'll get me out of this, I'll serve you the rest of my sinful life. God, let me be your John The Baptist for the Bums. Who's to take care of the poor bums, God? I'll take care of 'em

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— I'll save every last son-of-a-bitchin' one of 'em— only get me out of this. Listen to Jerry, God... I mean it, honest to Jesus, I mean it this time, God....'

“And you know, Jerry kept his word. He settled in New York and set up a mission of his own in the Bowery. He's still there. He makes the rounds of the back doors on the Avenues and collects clothes and food— He keeps a soup kitchen, and pays the rent on a loft, where transients can flop for ten cents a night, or if they haven't the price, they can flop for nothing, by confessing Jesus.

“Somehow the Blood of the Lamb must have seeped into his veins during all those years of outsmarting the gospel mongers, for with each handout of grub or bed or old clothes, he gives a generous handout of religion... 'Jesus needs fellers like you,' He'll tell the boys earnestly. 'Join the ranks of Jesus... Look at me! Jesus saved me... I'm a living sign for Jesus— Glory Hallelujah! ..... ”

A rather flagrant incident in Texas put a temporary end to Harry Kemp's tramping... He was thrown in jail for burglary. The charge was a mistaken one, but that did not deter the law from keeping him and two other happy-go-luckes in a moldy, rat-infested cell for three months. The boys had crept into a seemingly deserted warehouse one chilly spring night, and cut open some bales of grain to use their contents as a mattress for weary bones. The watchman who crept up on them while they were busy handling the bales, took them for robbers, and the owner had them arrested. The trio were finally freed by virtue of a heartrending plea, written by 23 Harry Kemp to the owner of the warehouse, asking him to withdraw prosecution proceedings. Impressed by the surprising eruditeness of the young 'thief', and especially since there was insufficient evidence of theft, the man did withdraw his charge.

While in jail, Harry says, the three of them drew modernistic murals on their walls and ceilings, and painted them with beet juice, blue ink, and yellow die obtained from soaking onion skins. He also began collecting jail and cocaine and rhymes of the songs from

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his cellmates— songs they had composed and would sing to one another for their own somber amusement. He copies them on pieces of wrapping paper with which the jailor occasionally covered the food basket in lieu of newspaper. 'Most of these jail songs and ballads could only be printed in asterisks' Harry explains. But here are two that are quotable: Oh, coco-marie, and coco-marai - I'se gonta sniff cocaine T'll I die - Ho! (sniff) ho! (sniff) Baby, take a whiff of me!

(The sniffing sound indicates the snuffing up into the nostril of the 'snow' or 'happy dust' as cocaine is called in the underworld) SONG ABOUT LICE..... There's a lice in jail As big as a rail When you lie down They'll tickle your tail Hard times in jail, poor boy.... Along come the jailor About 'leven o'clock Bunch keys in his right hand The jailhouse door was lock'd 'Cheer up, you pris'ners,' I heard that jailor say 'You got to go to the cane-brakes Foh ninety yeahs to stay'!

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When Harry walked out of the Big House, again a free bum, he carried a big scroll of wrapping paper with the songs of the convicts....

"I sat down on a railroad tie and tenderly took a brown package out of an inside pocket... The brown paper on which I had inscribed the curious songs of jail, cocaine, criminal and prostitute life which I had heard during three months sojourn behind bars. A rain storm blew up ... A heavy wind mixed with driving wet. The fast freight I was waiting for came rocking along. I made a run for it in the rapidly gathering dusk. I grabbed the bar on one side and made a leap for the step, but missed with one foot, luckily caught on with the other, or I might have fallen underneath.... and was aboard, my arms almost wrenched from their sockets. Not till I had climbed in between the cars onto the bumpers, did I realize that my coat had been torn open by the wind, and my much valued songs jostled out...."

As for the creative writing Kemp did while held prisoner— As always, his subject matter was influenced by his reading, and the only book he could obtain in jail was the Bible, so

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he read that. Subsequently out of his forced intimate study of Old Testament characters and adventures, he wrote a series of half-humorous Bible ballads. The following two are typical: THE CHANTEY OF NOAH AND HIS ARK Old Father Noah, he built him an Ark... Roofed it over with hickory bark..

-Old School Song Oh, Noah went up to the hills, a just man and a good, (Yo ho, lads, the rain must fall), He built an Ark, the Good Book says, of pitch and gopher wood; (And the water, it tumbles over all). The children danced before him, and the grownups laughed behind; They thought that there was something wrong with Goodman' Noah's mind...

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THE CHANTEY OF NOAH AND HIS ARK And when they met him coming back for needments and supplies, The dancing girls and dancing men leered, mocking, in his eyes, — And as he left the town once more and sought the hillward track, The boys sent shouts and whistles shrill behind the old man's back. Oh, Noah took the animals and saved them, two by two; The elephant, the leopard, and the zebra, and the gnu, The goose, the ox, the lion, and the stately unicorn That breasted up the gangway with his single, jaunty horn, The hippogriff, the oryx,— all created things, in fine, Till the dim procession straggled from the far horizon line. There was neighing, squealing, barking, there was many a snort and squeak, Every sound that God gives animals because they cannot speak; And they waddled and they straddled, and they ambled, and they ran, And they crawled and traipsed and sidled, each one after nature's plan. There was pattering of hooves and toes and lift of hairy knees— Oh, it was the greatest cattleboat that ever sailed the seas... There was never any showman ever gave such a parade As those beasts, that wended Arkward, for the gaping people made; And Noah's townsman wished him well who once had wished him ill— For they hoped he planned a circus on his solitary hill Where he'd charge so much admission at the Ark's red-postered door— Offering such a show as mankind never set eyes on before... But the sky grew dark with thunder throbbing like an angry drum And the gazers saw with terror that the thing they'd mocked had come, And that what had seemed a circus marching slowly in parade Was the end of all creation,

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and the world's last cavalcade. Oh, the lightning dangled nearer like a madman's rattling chain.... As an army moves to battle came the growing sound of rain: And it rained... and rained... and rained... and rained... As we do understand, Till the earth was filled with water and there wasn't any land!

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NOAH AND HIS ARK - CONTINUED Oh, Noah was a just man, a just man and a good... (Yo ho, lads, the rain must fall). He built the Ark, the Good Book says, of pitch and gopher wood, (And the water, it tumbled over all).

THE RHYME OF THE PRODIGAL You've youth and a girl and plenty of gold, What more can your heart desire?— Did it ever content the heart of youth to sit at home by the fire? I am leaving half my land to you and half of my flocks and herds— And I'd rather shepherd alien sheep and live on whey and curds. Don't go, don't go, my own little son, and leave me all alone— Will you never remember I'm not a child but a youth that's night man-grown? Think of your brother, your elder brother,— would you leave him all to bear?— He's only a brother of mine by birth who seldom speaks me fair, And I've had a dream, a wonderful dream of brothers that wait for me, Men made brethren by perils borne together on land and sea. Think of your mother, your own dear mother, and ponder what is best. — Would you tie me fast to an apron-string and make me a village jest? Your pallet is fine and soft with wool and you sleep in the upper room— And I'd liefer be in a fo'c'sle hold where one lamps swings in the gloom, In the fo'c'sle hold of a great-sailed ship that sunders the purple sea. My son, my son, will you break my heart to have your jest with me?— Father, I'm having no jest with you, but I'm earnest to go away; There's something that's gripping the soul of me that will not bide delay; I have dreamed and dreamed for nights of seas that break in alien foam

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THE RHYME OF THE PRODIGAL - CONTINUED And of magic cities that climb and climb with dome on golden dome And I'd rather be a beggar that crawls along some

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strange, far street Than living here where I rise each day to sit in the selfsame seat, To look in the face that is always the same at the stale, familiar board, What though the granaries burst with corn and the wine-jar brims to be poured! My lad, I see that you won't be moved, so here is your father's hand, And whenever you tire of ships and ports and yearn for the good home-land, Wearied to death of the waves that toss forever and ever about, Come home, so ragged the dogs forget,— and you'll find the latchstring out!

After his three months stay in jail, Kemp felt like experiencing the luxury of a four-poster with crisp white sheets, and a bath with plenty of hot water and soap... so he lit out for the home roost. His father welcomed him a bit dubiously, for the news of his degeneration had preceded him, but his mother, who must have had a strain of gypsy blood herself, took him back to her heart with tears. On his way home, vial via rail, Harry composed the following descriptive ballad of his trip: THE RETURN I hid behind a side-tracked car until there echoed clear As a signal of the starting, two sharp whistles on my ear, Then, with a long, laborious groan the freight got under way And ponderous cars went hulking by like elephants at play. I gripped an iron rung and swung aboard with flapping coat.

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THE RETURN - CONTINUED The engine sent a wailing dirge from its deep iron throat And vanished in a cut which gaped, a brown gash, new and raw; On either side the jagged rocks, like the broken teeth of a saw Leaped up and down with naked poles and racing strands of wire.... Then, flash! The engine reached the plain as a cannon belches fire, Wrapped in a cloud of rolling smoke. As on and on we flew The panorama of the fields went shifting out of view. A scared thrush shot up from a bush and sought the open sky; A herd of cattle raised their heads and stared rebukingly; Above a marching clump of trees a wind-mill spun its sheel, And from a bank of toppling cloud there crashed a thunder-peal. The sun went down, the stars came out, I crashed upon the coal Feeling as if I had been made a lone, unbodied soul: Chance with great hands might crumple me like any gossamer thing, Night o'er the ramparts of the flesh my startled spirit fling Where a scattered silver dust of worlds stream down through endless night As sun-notes in a

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darkened room dance down a shaft of light..... Now, like gigantic fireflies clustered on a Malay tree, The lamps of the division-end across the dark I see.... Dim boxcars huddle everywhere.. I laugh as I alight, For, safe and sound in life and limb, I'm home again tonight!

Again Harry, now in his early twenties, made an attempt at adopting a more decorous life— he enrolled at Mount Hermon Preparatory School in Massachusetts, afterwards tramping to Lawrence, Kansas, where he stayed some time, taking courses at the State University. Two forces began their work in him while at college: 1. A swiftly growing love for classic literature—, and athletics!— the spirit and the body vying for supremacy.

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He studied Greek, and became an accomplished Latinist; reading everything there was to be read, and especially plunging with passionate absorption into the study of the great English poets. His writing underwent a change toward serious and polished verse, and gradually entered the tradition of the classic, English song. Richard Legallienne, writing the introduction to Kemp's first volume of lyrics, 'the Passing God', defined his serious poetry thus; 'they all (the lyrics) combine a firm simplicity of contour with a thrill of apparently unsought beauty. Sometimes too, they recall the seemingly flower-like carelessness of the Restoration lyrists...'

One poem of this period will suffice to show his new and more mature trend of thought:  
THE CRY OF MAN There is a crying in my heart That never will be still, Like the voice of a lonely bird Behind a starry hill; There is a crying in my heart For what I may not know— An infinite crying of desire Because my feet are slow... My feet are slow, my eyes are blind, My hands are weak to hold: It is the universe I seek, All life I would enfold!

After years of living in the open, and hardening his muscles with chinning himself on train tenders, Harry Kemp had an easy time of it to become a star athlete while at college. Too

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spare and wiry of frame to make a good football man, he found his place on the track team, and became a very prodigy of a runner.

Come summer, and the school term over, he again took to the road, this time for a short jaunt into the pine woods of New Jersey to visit 30 Elbert Hubbard's Roycroft Shop—at that time a much talked-of enterprise. Elbert Hubbard was a man possessed with the dream of making men and women physically and spiritually perfect—a harking back to the old Greeks, with their worship of beauty and physical perfection.

The idea was for every man to work in a communal way at tasks he himself chose to perform, to work as much as possible in the open, thus ensuring bodily vigor, and incidentally contributing to the growth and upkeep of 'Perfection City'. The colonists lived in tents or self-constructed shelters among the fragrant pine woods, and wore as few clothes as they dared.

“Each had a special method of exercising, bending or standing,” Kemp relates. “Those who brought children allowed them to run naked. We older ones went naked, when we reached secluded places in the woods. The neighboring townspeople and other country folk used to come for miles about on Sundays to watch us swim and exercise. Everybody enjoyed a fad of his or her own. There was a little brown shriveled woman who believed that you should imbibe no fluid other than that found in fruits. When she wanted a drink, she never went to the pitcher, bucket or well— instead she sucked oranges or ate watermelon.

“There was a man from Philadelphia who ate nothing but raw meat. He had eruptions all over his body from the diet, but still persisted in it. Several young Italians ate nothing but vegetables and fruits raw. They insisted that all human ills came with cooking food—that the sun was enough of a chef....”

Tired, after a few months, of eating spinach and capering about the woods in a G-string, Kemp went back to the Middle West to continue his studies. He found that, due to the

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publication of some of his tramp ditties, he already had a reputation as the 'Vagabond Poets and 'The Boxcar Bard'.

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With everyone knowing his name and fame, and wanting to shake his hand, Harry began to feel a constraint upon his liberty, and he left school. Before this, however, he had met, and fallen in love (for the first time) with a young co-ed. His hero-conscious heart longed to impress her, and to win her through an act of bravery. A traveling circus passing thru the town furnished him with the means to do so.

The circus, though small, boasted six nubian lions, the largest and fiercest of their kind, and the management, for advertising purposes, offered a gold medal to anyone who would go in among the lions alone, and make a speech to the audience from the inside the cage....

"I negotiated with the manager, and asked for the medal's equivalent in money— since I was broke—. He offered me \$25 if I would go in the cage and repeat my speech three nights in succession. I bought three tickets, and presented them to Vanna, so as to be sure that she would attend all three performances.

"To clinch my lagging resolution, I allowed a reporter to take an announcement of my intentions for the local papers.... The resultant story was headed thus: HARRY KEMP TIRED OF LIFE KANSAS POET TO TALK AMONG LIONS!

"The great moment arrived. After seating his lions in a half moon on their tubs, the trainer shunted me into the cage... 'Quick, step in. We'll be on the outside with hot irons in case anything goes wrong.... But don't make any sudden or abrupt movements... 'The door of the iron cage clanged behind me.

"I stepped into the center, and rambled through the speech. The lions yawned. I finished confidently, and the audience applauded. The 32 papers again carried the story.

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“The second night I was rather blase, and shook my finger playfully in the face of one seated lion. He replied with a yellow-fanged snarl. I stepped back quickly; the other animals moved restlessly.... I pulled myself together, turned my back on them, and said in a not quite steady voice, 'So you see, ladies and gentlemen, that a lion is after all a much misrepresented, gentle beast...”

“After the show, the trainer came to me and barked: 'Don't tell them that lions are harmless and gentle! If you do that tomorrow, I'll see that you get a medal instead of money.'

“The third night, I delivered a constrained discourse, and only breathed freely when safely outside the cage. Well, at least, now I could hunt up Vanna, and expect the favors of a lady due her knight who had been victorious at the jousts.... Not finding her in the audience, I telephoned her home. Her mother told me Vanna had left three days ago for Maine!

“To make my chagrin the worse, a few weeks later, my unique and single glory as a Daniel was snatched from me. The show moved to Salina, and a barber in that town shaved the keeper in the cage, while the lions sat around....”

Harry Kemp thereupon decided to visit Europe,— as a poet this time, instead of a tramp. Lacking the money for a passage, he nonchalantly stowed away on a vessel sailing to England. When a day or two out at sea he was brought up before the captain, after true stowaway procedure, he gave the unique excuse for his misdemeanor that, he was a poet, anxious to visit the shrines of English poets dead and gone, but too poor to pay the passage for such a pilgrimage. The very originality of his plea seems to have won him unaccustomed consideration, and, as he was a stalwart man of his hands, 33 there was no difficulty in making him a useful member of the crew. For him to 'work his passage' was mere child's play, just an additional part of the fun. His pluck won sympathy for his plight, and though, on lading, it was impossible to save himself from a week or two in an English gaol (to him merely another amusing detail) the spirit of his adventure appealed to the

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English Magistracy, and he was eventually allowed to go his way and fulfill his boyhood's dream of visiting Westminster Abbey, Stratford-on-Avon, The Boar's Head in East-Cheap, The 'Cheshire Cheese', and other such places.

Back from his European adventure, and having made the acquaintance of some fellow writers of fame, Harry Kemp came home to find himself established as the 'tramp-poet of the Middle West'. It was perhaps unfortunate that his growing fame, his growing consciousness of the opposite sex, and his meeting with Upton Sinclair, then too, beginning to attract favorable notice from the critics, should have coincided in time. Harry fell in love with Sinclair's wife, and eloped with her to the backwoods of New Jersey! His love of freedom, quite logically perhaps, took the form of 'free love'. Sinclair naturally turned from being his friend and became Kemp's enemy and rival, even though as he explains, "Sinclair didn't discover that he loved his wife, till I tried to take her away from him..." One day, the young couple were surprised in their sylvan retreat by the unexpected entrance of the husband...who, despite rumour, still had no tangible evidence of actual wifely infidelity on the part of his mate... "We were lounging in the cabin," Harry tells it, 'and I was brushing her hair— it was the color of burnished brass— when we heard a step on the porch... like a flash I grabbed up a copy of Keats, and got myself settled in a chair at the other end of the room by the time Upton stomped in. 34 '... St. Agnes Eve! An bitter chill it was, The owl for all his feathers was a'cold....' I read stertoriously. Upton was not to be hoodwinked. He accused us of living together as man and wife. It was Mamie saved the situation — God, what a woman! She was splendid... Should have been an actress. She sat up in bed, and delivered a speech, that for its touching proclamations of fidelity, would have melted the heart of a stone— and Upton, despite copious evidence to the contrary, believed her.... I should have learned a lesson from that incident— a woman who can fool one man, can fool another.... "A few weeks later she left me to take a short 'trip' to the city. After a month of absence, in which I nearly went frantic, she sent me a bulky envelope containing my letters written to her... together with a brief announcement of her engagement to another man." Furthermore, Kemp's reputation suffered by this incident, for

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his editors, with the mistaken idea of punishing him for his indiscretions, refused to publish his verse, though his writing, doubtless due to the stimulation of passion, was at that time better than ever before. An impudent columnist [caracatured?] characted the incident by printing this verse in 'The Globe': Kemp: I am the Hobo poet I lead a merry life One day I woo the muse The next— Another fellow's wife! So far Kemp, he salved his wound with writing, and one poem, composed in the form of a sea-chantey, stated the situation in a very apt and jaunty note: The following poem had perhaps something to do with his walking around the glove [?] The GIRL THAT MARRIED ANOTHER MAN Oh, it's easy come and it's easy go With most of the little girls I know,— Haul away, my bullies;

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THE GIRL THAT MARRIED ANOTHER MAN - CONTINUED And when you come, and when you part, They never take it deep to heart,— Haul away, my bullies. Oh, there was Martha, at Liverpool, She never heard of the golden rule,— Haul away, my bullies; And there was Gulla, the temple girl, And Minnie, and Marie, and Pearl,— Haul away, my bullies, In Rotterdam, Marseilles, Orleans,— And each of them taught me what love means; Haul away, my bullies.... But there is a girl that stands apart, I can never get her out of my heart,— Haul away, my bullies; Oh, I try to forget, but I never can, The girl that married another man— Haul away, my bullies! TRAMP POET 111. THE WINE CELLAR

Like many another writer, with the ideal of freedom in mind, Harry Kemp migrated to New York's Greenwich Village— and there he has pretty much remained ever since.

“The Village of 1912 was full of long haired men and short haired women.... “Harry remembers the women went about in psyche gowns and sandals— The men affected the Byronic style. The various artists and literati tumbled over each other in a heroic attempt to make of poverty a splendid bride— whereas I, for one, soon found out she's really a very sordid mistress.”

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Kemp described his early village quarters this way: 36 A POET'S ROOM GREENWICH VILLAGE- 1912 I have a table, cot and chair And nothing more. The walls are bare Yet I confess that in my room Lie Syrian rugs rich from the loom, Stand statues poised on flying toe, Hand tapestries with folk a-flow As the wind takes them too and fro. And workman fancy has inlaid My walls with ivory and jade. Though opening on a New York Street Full of cries and hurrying feet My window is a faery space That gives on each imagined place; Old ruins lost in desert peace; The broken fanes and shrines of Greece; Aegean Islands fringed with foam; The everlasting tops of Tome; Troy flowing red with skyward flame, And every spot of hallowed fame. Outside my window I can see The sweet blue lake of Galilee, And Carmel's purple-regioned height And Sinai clothed with stars and night. But this is told in confidence, So not a word when you go hence, For if my landlord once but knew My attic fetched so large a view, The churl would never rest content Till he had raised the monthly rent!

It was upon entering the Bohemian life, that Kemp first began to chant of the “lusty sweetness of the vine”... “Joy is like the purple grape” he sang once in one of his poems, and in prohibition times, this axiom doubtless became doubly true. He has many fascinating stories to tell about Village characters and Village adventures, but his great favourite among Village cronies is Tony of the Wine Cellar....

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“The main hangout of our crowd was the Wine Cellar at Mc Dougal and Third. Tony, a big strapping Italian, worked in the place. Mamma Rosa was there too. She was a great big woman with enormous haunches like a Rubens painting.

“The Wine Cellar was just a dug-out— it looked like the catacombs—a series of caves leading into each other. It was just a hole; uneven stone steps leading down to a sawdust floor; rude board tables, a fat-bellied stove near the center. In the back there was a cave-like place where the wine was stored— right up against the city sewer pipes.

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“Tony kept a big brute of a dog chained under the steps, and he had it trained to bark like hell at the sight of a blue coat and a double row of brass buttons... That pup never failed to yelp 'jiggers' when a cop snooped around, and zzst! would go the bottles into the storeroom in the back, so when they walked in, there was a nice respectable spaghetti joint.

“A crowd of us used to go in there, and we got to like Tony and Mamma, mainly because they treated us with no respect whatsoever. We'd drop in afternoons to have a glass of wine. Come dinner time, Mamma would waddle out with a big wooden platter piled with raw onions, radishes, and fresh-baked Italian bread, long as baseball-bats. We'd absently munch bread and onions which would make us thirsty for more wine, and drinking more wine made us hungry again— so our wives, if we had any, never saw us home to dinner, and long and short of it was, we stayed at Tony's all afternoon and all night. Mamma Rosa knew her 'onions': In those days Tony's place was booming with trade.

“Tony was rough on his customers— and they like it. When he figured you'd had enough, he'd refused to bring another glass.

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“Nothin doin'— You had 'nough,” he'd growl, and if you argued with him, he'd slam his fist on the table so's the bottles would bust and tell you to get the hell out of there. I've seen Tony throw plenty of big men out single-handed. He had a pair of huge beam-like arms that could tear a guy apart. He'd swear and call us 'sons of beetches;... so we became the ' Sons-a-Beetches Club. '

“The place was patronized by both literary men and bums— there was no discrimination— in fact you could rarely tell the bums and the 'lits' apart. 'Course some of us, though poets, looked more like bums— and others of us managed to look like poets although we were little better than— well...

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“Anyway, the ultra-Ritz from Pawk Avenoon went crazy about the 'atmosphere' at Tony's. I remember one afternoon a party of them came twittering in, and proceeded to get gay on Tony's excellent Italian brew. One fellow climbed unsteadily onto a table and began shouting a toast. Up came Tony waving a towel as if it were a horsewhip. “You shut up — you get out!” he growled. Those spats-and-canes just gaped. “Beg pawdon?” the man said. 'I said, get out!' Tony said, and he meant it. They actually begged him for permission to buy another round of drinks, but Tony wouldn't do it— He hustled them out of there.

“Tony was rough on the Village crowd too, but he had a soft spot for us just the same....

“Manna Rosa had a big challop of a daughter— Lena— a black-eyed red-cheeked wench — she was rather shy and usually stayed in the kitchen. “Well, Tony fell in love with her. “Oi, what a gel! he'd whisper and put on a broad wink. We'd see him through the open kitchen door smack her on the behind as he went past. She'd giggle and hit him back— He courted her one whole winter like that, and she kept hitting him back, so he knew she felt the same way about it. In the spring they got married, and on the wedding 39 night Tony let all of us let as drunk as we wanted for once. What a night! A bunch of us locked ourselves in the wine cellar under the pipes and were swigging it pretty hard. I got the idea I was waiting for a fast freight out of Omaha— I started swinging from the sewer pipes and pretty soon we were all swinging from pipe to pipe like chimpanzees. Our feet bumped against the bottles and knocked them down. We made a terrible racket. There was a sound of splintering wood, and the most terrible cursing. Then we saw an axe blade crash through the door. Tony burst in. We were gory from the spilled wine, and huddling in a corner. Tony thought somebody had been murdered, and yelled to Lena to phone an ambulance. She phoned the fire department instead— God what a time— we all landed in jail and Tony too. After that he wouldn't let us in the place for a week— but he always softened up. He really couldn't resist us for long.

“Well, Tony was a great guy— he's dead now— but I'll come to that later. He was a great guy... Mama Rosa went back to Italy and left Tony and Lena the care of the Celler. For

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awhile everything was jake. Then Tony and Lena decided to take a holiday and visit the old country. They closed the place down.

“He was gone two years. Then they came back. They had a little bambino. The day Tony took the boards off the window, our old crowd was standing around watching him do it. We trooped in, whooping it up in all the dust and cobwebs. The wine had been left just where it sat— and it was all the better for being two years older. We figured times would be just as they used to be. But something had happened to the Village in the meantime — new clubs had sprung up— new cafes, and Tony had competition. Except for the 'Sons-a-beetches' he had been forgotten. “It's the depression,”

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he'd say sadly. He made the mistake of letting his patrons cut up a little too much— There was quite a bit of rough stuff going on— and the cops didn't like it. Finally the bastards planted a hop-head in Tony's place, and got him on the charge of selling dope. There was really nothing like that at Tony's—but Tony since he was not doing so well, didn't have the dough to tip the cops, and they got sore, and ran him in on a framed charge. Tony had to close down the Cellar.

“He moved to 6th Avenue and opened another place on the ground floor, but it didn't pay either. Tony, always such a strong strapping guy, began getting unevenly thin— it was funny— his paunch was as healthy looking as ever, but his shoulders sagged, his neck got scrawny, and his legs weak and bandied— his big round beaming face got longer and longer.

“All his confidence was gone. He no longer ordered people around and lorded it over his customers. The more cringing and obsequous he became, the less they liked coming to his place— and trade dropped off to almost nothing. Tony was frantic. He tried all sorts of ways to win his way back—redecorated the place, pulled out the partitions and clumsily attempted to modernize it— stuck in paper-machine props, and hung phony grapes around

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—he made a mess of it — and his place soon looked like all the rest of the lower class cafe's— It was all no good. We all felt sorry for him, but in the end, our crowd deserted him too. For years I let Tony slip completely out of my mind.

“One day, I was walking along sixth avenue, and saw a commotion in the street. Come to find out it was Tony, keeping a crowd of sneering onlookers at bay with a baseball bat. He was unbelievably gaunt and trembling, but his eyes burned black— “I keel you! he was shreiking. I went up to him and when he recognized me, he let me lead him inside. The 41 place was empty, and the floor hadn't had a scrubbing for weeks. Lena had died. There was no one there but a little red-haired waitress. She and Tony looked like they were both starving. I got some of the guys, and we tried to persuade Tony to sell the place, and settle down at something else. But he wouldn't do it. He just couldn't believe that he was finished. He dragged out a bottle of wine, poured us drinks, and started talking about old times. “Have more—more—” he said, when we'd finished our glasses. remembered — and it gave me an actual pain to remember it— Tony waving a towel and shouting “You don't get more— that's nuff, boys, no more!” And we all looked at Tony now, saying “Have more, boys—” and holding up an empty bottle.

“Well, it was not so long ago, they held Ton's funeral—and the black cars heaped with flowers filed along through Bleeker Street. It was a sunny day— all the pushcart peddlers in Bleeker stood along the curb holding their hats while the slow black cars went by. His Italian friends gave him a swell funeral— there were limousines with chauffeurs in the procession. It turned up Third and then into Mc Dougal, and Tony's hearse slid elegantly by the place where the Wine Cellar had been.....

A song called 'Wine Cellar' became Kemp's momento to Tony's Memory: WINE CELLAR  
The owner of our cellar, great-girthed, young, Presides, the Rhadamanthus of each glass:  
Before his blank, slow, expert eyes must pass Each applicant for solace of the vine. At  
tables of rude board, ring-stained with wine, We group, both brief, and voluble of tonue, To  
boast of what has been, or never was.

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WINE CELLAR - CONTINUED For what we were, or never yet have been, Breaks into easy wonder, as we will: We scale the heights without laborious skill - Yet is it nothing to cast forth distrust And resurrect companionship from dust? If wine abet each bosom in its sin,- These are the virtues that endue it still. When senates pledge us facts that never fail, When codes provide us half this cellar's bliss, When decalogues prove richer than the kill Of life, at sudden lips: then I'll believe That men and women who hate, love laugh, grieve, Through laws may gain the spirit's ultimate grail And gain in heaven what earth brings amiss.... Full easily to accompanied hells merge feet Of folk; though each heart, separate and stark, Must ache alone, with none but God to mark (God did this not - Saints say - the Devil did!). And doubly luring lurks what laws forbid: From blaring noises of the City street These stairs reel, steep-descending, to the Dark. Yet, somehow, heaven sits inside each hell, And hell, inside each heaven! and here men know Woe, an anodyne relief from woe- That touch of glee that wakes the barren rod

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WINE CELLAR - CONTINUED Whose buds attest old Bacchus still a god: While, up there, teeming horns of traffic swell, And harried feet of frightened moderns go... When driven by the thrust of small affairs, To my regret, or to my whole delight, During the days, or down the gulfs of night, Where night lurked, rank to bring a dawn less sweet - Glorifying brokenly in my defeat, How often have I gone down these steep stairs, How often, singing, stumbled up their height! And many a rhyme has blossomed from my pen From many cups of woe or ecstasy: With sweet fruit of The New Forbidden Tree I've freed my heart a little from the wrong The self does to the self - with a quick song Perhaps to bring joy to my fellow men When better wine for younger lips shall be!

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The picturesque appeal of the Village which early captured Kemp's imagination, became responsible for many, other colorful ballads, celebrating Bohemianism. There is room to quote but a few of these. PUSH-CARTS, ON BLEEKER STREET. Rolling with dawn,

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they came to fill the bare Street, with an ancient Mediterranean air; From cellars where they'd hereded, waiting light, The push-carts swayed—each to its destined site.... There, hinting cornucopias, they showed forth Colours not consonant with this bleak North; Or if Sight, of the senses most divine Next hearing, could be said to have its wine, Like Taste—she broached a vintage opulent From shape and colour, to the eyes' content! Those hard pomegranates, bursting-red with seeds Bespoke the fire vine-sloped Vesuvius breeds; And fruits like shellfish, marked with fuzzy spores, Seemed brought from rocky isles with drip of oars. (Ah, ghosts of triremes just off Sicily, With Commerce the forced bride of Piracy!)... Ordered bananas, flecked with black and gold, Lay next to oranges in still heaps rolled, And green, fresh figs, by russet yam, bunched grape, Brothered on squash and gourd of grotesque shape

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PUSH-CARTS, ON BLEEKER STREET -CONTINUED Like clowns from plays by Plautus. A-bicker with mirth Or crepitant with scorn, before one cent came forth, Digits all action, eyebrows, shoulders raised, In quick Italian, folk appraised, dispraised... Then there were fruits not many miles from home That shared the shape and touch of ancient Rome: Smaragdine apples jostling ruddier ones,

Radical movements in Greenwich Village during the pre-war years, touched Harry only indirectly— their touch was both amusing, entertaining, and slightly irritating—like the tickling of a straw— but class- consciousness never profoundly affected him one way or the other.

His satirical “To A Nightingale, On The Five Year Plan”, served to irk some of his communist friends, but conviction clothed in jest they found is a slippery thing to argue with.... TO A NIGHTINGALE, ON THE FIVE YEAR PLAN. My heart quakes, and a dreadful dumbness pains My sense as though of vodka I had drunk, Or emptied some five year plan to the drains, For poetry, and lethe-wards had sunk: My bird, thou must forego thy happy lot, And, in this time of proletarian stress Shun such melodious plot: Thou must

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constrict thy throat, and make song less... The word goes forth— 'Rhyme we want, but not these!'

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TO A NIGHTINGALE, ON THE FIVE YEAR PLAN. - CONTINUED Some literary would-be, who has been Put up in power, like God, above the earth, Must henceforth tell thee how to sing, when green Spring, riotous, comes, to fire all lives with mirth. Bring tapes and rulers forth! - from north to south, Writers must fit the plan — no Hippocrene Shall pour! 'Now what the hell is Hippocrene?' Nightingale, mould thy song to humour him! If not with heart, with mouth, Or unheard thou wilt be as well unseen, Fading away, thy ame forever dim. Thus Keats would have been forced, from fury pale To discipline his singing nightingale: Instead of song whose fame will never cease We'd got of him— a five years masterpiece!

Harry Kemp today, living alone in his large, barn-like, Greenwich Village studio, has the look of a man who has achieved that rare transmutation, the fusion of spirit with flesh... He is man of action, and man of imagination: The Tramp and The Poet.

In an introduction to one of his books — (He as written a total of fifteen, novels and verse —) he himself states the two-in-one quality of a poet's disposition:

...“Early set apart from the usual run of folk, the poet will see with other eyes, hear with other ears. He will know two worlds, instead of one, continually to cope with— The world of imagination, paired with the world of irrefragable fact...”

But tramp-poetry one might not unnaturally expect to be the unkempt rhymings, probably in vers libre of some half-educated pretender, with far 47 more tramp in it than poetry. Curiously enough, the exact reverse is true; for Harry Kemp's serious work is highly wrought and polished, and in the direct tradition of the noblest, classic English song.

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In his song, "Farewell", he again reiterates the wedding of life and art which has fashioned his personality: FAREWELL Tell them, O sky-born, when I die With high romance to wife,  
That I went out as I had lived, Drunk with the joy of life. Yea, say that I went down to death  
Serene and unafraid, Still loving song, and loving still Life, of which song is made!

\*\*\*\*\* 48 New York Parts 1 & 2 Missing 1938-9 Beliefs and Customs - Folk Stuff  
PART III THE POETRY THEATRE

The love of action which made a glorified tramp of Harry Kemp the poet, found other avenues of expression in the writing and acting of poetic drama. He spent a year as a member of the Provincetown Players in the company of Eugene O'Neil, Clifford Odets and other soon-famous young playwrights who had their first tryouts in Provincetown, before returning to Greenwich Village where he established a one-act theatre of his own in 1921.

The idea was to produce only poetic plays, for, as Harry says, "the most vital expression through drama is attained when the visual or material action is coupled with imagistic or mental interplay— the mind and the emotions being simultaneously stimulated"— and this demands a wedding of poetry with drama.

Looking for a suitable home for his high-flung venture, Kemp decided the "Minettas", then an undeveloped neighborhood and shunned as 'the badlands of the Village', was the ideal location for his poetry Theatre. "The Minettas in those days were given over to rag-pickers and petty gangsters", Harry tells us. "Vincent Peppy owned the whole thing and was having bad luck with it because he couldn't rent any of his tumble-down houses to respectable people. I persuaded him to let me have a whole house rent-free, and promised to make the district as popular as Washington Square with my poetry theatre. That's more or less how it turned out, too.

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“After we moved in and fixed up the place with a stage, dressing rooms, and living quarters for myself on the top floor, it became clear that I'd have to join the 'gang' of cut-throats and coke-eaters and make friends of them, to keep them from breaking windows, running away with the box office, or abducting the actresses. So I used to invite the guys in for a drink once in a while, and to keep them in good humour, we'd let them watch the plays from the back of the hall free— on condition that they'd control their urge to boo and cat-call during the love-scenes...”

That year, Kemp produced several of his own one-act poetic dramas, including “The White Hawk”, “Don Juan the Gardner”, “The Game Called Kiss” and “Solomon's Song.” He also did some very successful adaptations of famous poems, which lent themselves to dramatic portrayal. One of the earliest adaptations was of Robert Frost's poem “Home Burial.” At that time the famous Pantano Murder Scandal in Brooklyn filled the New York papers. Among other sympathizers with the young Pantano who had been condemned to the chair, was Theodore Dreiser. Kemp used a newspaper transcript of Dreiser's interview with the murderer as the basis for a realistic poetic-drama, and himself became instrumental in protesting the execution of Pantano.

...‘One day’, Harry tells us, ‘Jack Gould, the son of old Jay Gould, walked in during a dress rehearsal of “Calypso”, a new play of mine, and he brought with him a very lovely young girl, with a great heap of corn-colored hair, piled high on her head. She was about nineteen but looked even younger. Jack wanted me to give her a tryout as my next leading lady. She was not tall, but slender, and had beautiful hands, except that the thumbs were a pair of unjointed stubs— she has to build them out, you know, for the movies.... well, I had her read for me, and she was perfect... had excellent stage presence although she'd had no experience. I asked her what her name was. She said, 50 Ann Harding. I told Jack to take her up to Provincetown, and they billed her there immediately as the lead in Susan Glaspel's 'The Inheritors'. Ann didn't stay there long, I'm told. David Belasco saw her, and shipped her off to Hollywood.....’

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'Well, I'll tell you what finally made me leave the Minettas... it was getting mixed up with those toughs there... they were good guys, never harmed any of us, but turned out to be a nuisance. As I said, I became a member of their gang— ' The 606 Outfit ' named after a drink they brewed themselves. Around christmas time, the Downing Street Gang, with which the 606 had regular feuds, sent word they were going to raid my place— burn the stage and furnishings, and confiscate the actresses... I took the occasion to plan a Christmas party for my friends, and jokingly advised them to bring their guns. Everyone of them came with a pistol and a pint of liqueur on either hip, and I was the only one who didn't take the situation seriously. So I was considerably surprised and frightened when about midnight there was a heavy pounding on the door, and voices yelling 'open up!' The boys got to their feet, and reached for their belts, but I struck a Ceasarian pose and commanded them to let me handle the intruders. I figured I'd talk turkey to the marauders, offer them a drink, and maybe coax them out of a killing mood. I flung the door open, yelling Merry Christmas! There stood two men from the precinct station! 'Well, Kemp! What're you doing here? We had a report there's some rough stuff goin' on here. Whose place is this?' 'Mine', I said, in a small voices....

'Well, I had some explaining to do at night court... and the upshot was I took the law's advice and decided to move my Poetry Theatre to a more placid neighborhood...."

Kemp got in tough with an old friend, Dr. Guthrie, who owned the abandoned St. Marks Chapel then standing on 10th Street at Avenue A. Dr. Guthrie gave soirees for old women which he dignified by calling 'poetry recitals'.

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He had long been after Kemp to recite at one of these. Now Kemp got Guthrie to promise him the use of the church basement for his Theatre, in exchange for appearing regularly at Guthrie's soirees.

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The place was large, but rather dark, and badly heated. Moreover there was no furniture. The actors rented a set of funeral chairs for the audience, and buklit a stage out of the minister's rostrum. Kemp conceived the idea of producing a series of authentic Indian mimes— religious and tribal rituals of the North American Indian. He inserted an advertisement in the world: 'real Indians Wanted!' The church basement became the mecca of a caravan of feathered and painted Indians, real and otherwise. The Broadway redskins were willing to act the mimes, but knew nothing about tribal ritual; while the real Indians, belonging to The Five Nations, who came down from upstate, were well grounded in their own lore, but refused to display, what to them were sacred tribal rituals, before the white men. The Indian mimes, Kemp tells us, were finally acted by some college boys from the Bronx, in the borrowed costumes of The Five Nations, and Clifford Odetts took the lead in the one-act drama. Broadway producers arrived the third night to sit uncomfortably on the funeral chairs, but to applaud heartily when the curtain came down. Heywood Broun, Alexander Woolcott, David Belasco, and William Brady appeared in the audience, and thereafter the critics began to watch the progress of Kemp's Poetry Theatre with interest.

Asked what it was that finally broke up the movement, Kemp admits that despite the growing success of his Poetry Theatre, he could not give it his undivided attention. Why?..... 'Well, while I lived in Minetta Lane, I had the top attic fixed up as a rendezvous... At that time I was in love with a young married woman, who had a wealthy pig of a husband... She used to come to me there... would drive down in a taxi. The 606 boys, who hung around the place, would fight among themselves as to who should open the door and assist her ladyship from the cab. They'd stand around like peasant boys with their 52 caps off, grinning and chewing on their quids. She was a lovely thing, and the gang was in awe of her.

'Later when I moved to Avenue A, we got an apartment together. Well, what started all the rumpus and finally resulted in the breakdown of the Poetry Theatre, was that her husband started a story in a Boston paper to the effect that I, Harry Kemp, had left a wife

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and four brats somewhere in the west and was now living in the village with another man's wife. The thing was absurd, and my lawyer uncovered that fact that there was a man by the name of 'Harry Kemp'— a laborer who was reported for desertion by his wife down in Arkansas or somewhere— and I was supposed to be him. My lawyer's name was Crooker. I had him file a suit for \$5000 for libel against the 'Boston American'. Nothing seemed to come of it, and that as I soon found out, was because Crooker was as crooked as his name. He accepted my fees and just let the thing ride. So I decided to take it on myself. I took a train down to Boston, and called on the editor of the 'American' A Hearst sheet. I told him it was my turn to give him some publicity. I said, I'm invited to a press banquet at which Willy Hearst is the guest of honor, and if I don't see \$5000 hit me through the mail before then, I'm going to pull Willy's pants down, lay him over a table and give him the spanking of his life... and I'll see that every paper in America carries the story and full particulars as to the grudge I bear the Boston American. I would have done it too. But next day I got a check for the \$5000. Somehow the affair left a bad taste in both our mouths.... I split the money with my girl, and we shook hands, auf wiedersehen... She sailed for Paris with her pig of a husband....

'The theatre began to pall on me... I guess I was getting old. I decided to settle down and do some writing... My cape and sword days were over.' Songs and Rhymes - Yeag Songs and Poems N.Y. [8/25'38?] [Loving?] Folklore [??]

### Yeag Songs and Poems

[Lady please.?] Oh lady would you be kind enough to give me a bite to eat, A little bread and butter, A little plate of jam, A dozen or two of nice fried eggs And a pound and a half of ham. [??]