

The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp



HASTEN to protest at the outset that I have no personal knowledge of the incorrigible Super-tramp who wrote this amazing book. If he is to be encouraged and approved, then British morality is a mockery, British respectability an imposture, and British industry a vice. Perhaps they are: I have always kept an open mind on the subject; but still one may ask some better ground for pitching them out of window than the caprice of a tramp. I hope these expressions will not excite unreasonable expectations of a thrilling realistic romance, or a scandalous chronicle, to follow. Mr. Davies autobiography is not a bit sensational: it might be the Post Office Directory for the matter of that. A less simple minded supertramp would not have thought it worth writing at all; for it mentions nothing that might not have happened to any of us. As to scandal, I, though a most respectable author, have never written half so proper a book. These pudent pages are unstained with the frightful language, the debased dialect, of the fictitious proletarians of Mr. Rudyard Kipling and other genteel writers. In them the patrons of the casual ward and the dosshouse argue with the decorum of Socrates, and narrate in the style of Tacitus. They have that pleasant combination of childish freshness with scrupulous literary conscientiousness only possible to people for whom speech, spoken or written, but especially written, is still a feat to be admired and shewn off for its own sake. Not for the life of me could I capture that boyish charm

and combine it with the savoir vivre of an experienced man of the world, much less of an experienced tramp. The innocence of the authors manner and the perfection of his delicacy is such, that you might read his book aloud in an almshouse without shocking the squeamishness of old age. As for the young, nothing shocks the young. The immorality of the matter is stupendous; but it is purely an industrial immorality. As to the sort of immorality that is most dreaded by schoolmistresses and duennas, there is not a word in the book to suggest that tramps know even what it means. On the contrary, I can quite believe that the author would die of shame if he were asked to write such books as Adam Bede or David Copperfield.

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