

Daniel M. Garrison, the author of the second portion of "A Modern Tour of The Prairies" was born in Charleston, South Carolina, and then attended the Naval academy and St. John's college, Annapolis, Maryland. After his four years there he traveled in Haiti, England, Canada, and parts of the United States. His portion of this article is the second half of his and Robert Webb's trip which they took in the summer of 1932 northwestward into Wyoming, and then east to New York City. Garrison and Webb are free lancing while living in Norman

## A modern tour of the prairies

BY ROBERT WEBB, '32

LEAVING Norman the first Monday after school was out we spent the night in the railroad yards at El Reno. The freight had come in at twelve that night.

The sky was low and heavy with clouds and before daylight the cold came. Going down the track towards where the yardman said the freight train would go out, we met men going to work. They were indistinct and a composite gray in the breaking daylight. They looked harried and worn, too, and they made us feel very strong. Epithets like "work ox" and "wage slave" came into our minds. But they did not stay. These workmen looked too tired and worn, like man had become at last the slave of that which he had created. Lights were coming on in the houses along the track and along with feeling strong and free there was that other feeling of being on the outside of a huge thing, of looking on and seeing only just a little. But mainly there was the sense of being outside, excluded.

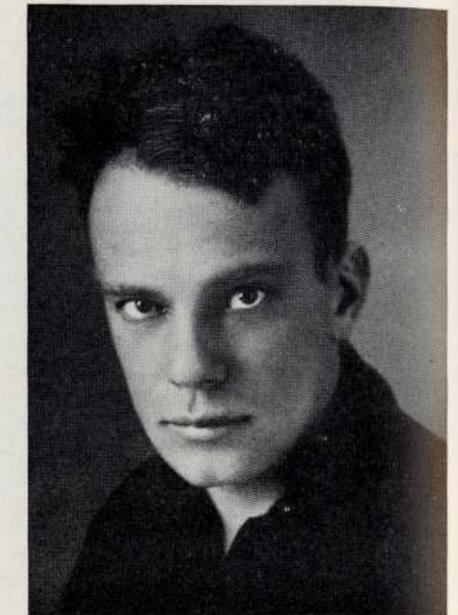
Scattered along the right of way waiting for the freight were other tramps, sleeping or squatting around fires. One man lay sleeping on his face in the wet grass. He wore no shoes, his shirt was wet as with sweat, and beads of dew stood out, glistening, on his hair and neck. His ribs were sharply outlined against the skin through his torn shirt. A little farther on a fat man, his stomach rising briefly, ponderous above the rest of his body, lay sleeping in a ditch with his head wrapped in a coat.

It was easy to catch the freight out. Before the train was out of the yard the boxcar we were in was almost filled. There was laughter and shouting and

those already in extended hands to those outside. Most of the riders were boys younger than eighteen. It seemed that circumstances had forced on them a holiday. They sat swinging their feet in the door and thumbing their noses at farmers and the occupants of waiting cars, and shouted greetings with a restraint none too classical at girls in the small towns along the railroad. In contrast to them was an old time tramp sitting back from the door against the wall. His hands and face were clean and his clothes were clean and meticulously mended. His snorts of derision at these "scenery bums" and "punks" came out sharp and distinct over the more fibrous sound of their young voices. Slowly the old tramps are being excluded from the roads by these younger ones.

We were going to Denver with a change of trains at Amarillo. In Amarillo we were very careful to avoid the dreaded and almost legendary Denver Bob, a railroad agent of the old school and reported killed nine times throughout trampdom, each time by a different bad negro. Denver Bob was indifferent to us, and when the freight went out, Dan and I were on it, riding the frame work of steel over the rear axle of a ballast car. Before reaching Dalhart the train was stopped for two hours by one of the Panhandle's short lived but intense rain and electrical storms.

The storm passed and in Dalhart we got in a boxcar. It was packed full and there was the odor of tobacco smoke, breaths, bodies and wet clothing. There was talk and conjecture, always conjecture, and men getting off and others getting on all through the night; en-



tities, human and complete, but with designations as vague and indefinite as those of the races.

Before daylight the cold came in again making wet clothes feel like casts of ice. The cold was different, sharper and less enveloping, metallic as if it came from snow. Then the crack in the door showed gray and the door was partly opened. The mountains were going up all around us, their tops nebulous and delicately pointed, and snowcapped against the sky. The tracks followed the winding valley, and the engine, sleek and fleet, like a pointer dog, stretched out ahead, its rope of white smoke coming back like a flag behind.

Before dark that night we were in Denver. Getting off in the edge of the yards, we circled towards the center of the city, going through what had been the old Ghetto.

Uptown we called Dr. B. A. Botkin, who, enroute to Missoula, Montana, was visiting the western poet, Thomas H. Fariel. The evening was pleasant and sharply contrasted to the past few we had spent.

Later, on Sunday morning, sitting on the curb on the less presentable end of old Larimer street, we were taken in hand by a young communist, who after five minutes impassioned conversation enthusiastically promised to present us at court—i.e. the unemployment council's headquarters, which he did. Thus encouraged we visited all the labor organizations.

Then we went over to one of the Sunday meetings held by Bishop Frank Rice, president, secretary and treasurer and sole bishop of the Liberal church, incorporated. The meeting was held in a

vacant lot off Larimer street. All faiths, black, white or brown, and as Rice pointed out, even Christians were free to speak there.

But this man Rice refuses to be captured by adjectives. A great romanticist of an Irishman, a born showman and an ardent lover of it, half lyrical in either ridicule or praise, and above all admirably inconsistent as the Irish usually are. Along with his activities he runs a "flop house" on Larimer street where what he terms "Hoover's unemployed children" may sleep for a night or many nights without taking to themselves a religion, having their pasts and pedigrees authenticated, or being made to feel that their benefactor must indeed be generous to treat them with ordinary kindness.

We stayed in Denver a week and then were down in the freight yard waiting again for a train. It was dark and the train came slowly out of the yard. We squatted in the grass, letting the coal cars go by. On the loaded cars were men rolling the coal over the side to be picked up and taken away before daylight.

Then the boxcars and tankers began coming by. There would be the quick patter of shod feet in the cinders and gravel, silence a moment and then the muted thud of a body against the boxcar's wall, and a silhouette of greater density than the dark, going hand over hand towards the top. Behind and ahead there were other shortly terminated patters of feet and flesh-softened

thuds—the mystery and poetry of action—and the clacking of the wheels came steadily faster and metallicly irate. There were no open boxcars and we caught a tanker rather than ride the top.

And then as if to purge our minds of pleasure at the shallow drama of men taking trains out in the dark for unknown places, it began to get cold. The track was on a gradual up grade going towards Cheyenne. As we went steadily higher into the Rockies' it became as steadily colder. First we shivered with the cold but after two hours we became numb and apathetic. Our eyelids were heavy but there was no sleep. Feeling went out of hands and feet and we stood on the narrow runway with arms hooked over the hand bars. The train went on, never stopping and there would be the sense of gliding earth beneath you and time beating monotonously on your brain. We shouted until we were hoarse, stamping dead feet. It was a relief, the sense of action in your mind. The lights from the houses, porous and yellow in the dark, came to seem like minute summaries of all the warmth and melancholy of life and death to us on that tank car, and the light struck you like a shaft of lost sunlight and left you shivering in the static cold after it was gone.

The freight stopped in Cheyenne shortly after daylight. In the jungle there was a fire to warm by.

hadn't we begged before? That old pride. It is not very easy to degrade yourself before your fellow men.

For hours we had walked through the residential section of town. Retracing our steps many times. It would always be the next house; the one with the big white porch; with the woman watering the lawn; with the cat stretched out on the pavement sleeping in the sun. Beware—ferocious dog. Then there would be children playing in the street, and we crossed to a new block. Young eyes frightened us. We ran away from them; their laughter made us feel unclean. Were we cowards? We scolded each other, ourselves. Then hunger spoke and its booming voice drowned out our mental puppet show.

"Lady, have you got something you can give a hungry man to eat?"

I do not like to beg. But when I am hungry, I am liable to do anything.

## II

### *Men without countries.*

"Hoover blew the whistle,  
Mellon rang the bell.

The banks borrowed all the money,  
And the country's shot to hell."

It was at Illmo, Missouri that we heard our first B. E. F. crusader. We were dirty, hungry and broke. So were the rest of the little group that listened and agreed that Mellon, Hoover and their capitalistic brothers were personally responsible for our destitution. We jeered, we damned, we had a glorious time; and felt for the first time that we had a country. The railroad bull that chased us out of the yard a few minutes later didn't think so. And we forgot about it. But even if we had remembered I don't know how it could have helped us. When the train started we piled out of the weeds and hooked her on the fly.

We left our veteran friend sleeping in front of a row of Negro shacks, under the heavy slaughter-house stench of East St. Louis. The next crusaders, fifty or more, were found in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Uniforms, medals and dirty dungarees. Some had been to Washington before and had taken advantage of the free transportation home, offered by the government, to go and see their loved ones, or to talk more boys into coming to the Capitol. Now they were returning fired anew with determination.

"We'll stay in Washington 'till they pay us our money if it takes to 1945."

But they didn't. Even us innocent tramps, although we were strong for wars; we wanted to see which country would draft us, found there were no gentlemen in Washington. Fortunately it wasn't the only city in the world. So we glombed the guts of a northbound freight for old New York Town.

# The dogs do bark

THE TOUR CONTINUED

BY DANIEL GARRISON

## I

*I do not like to beg.*

"Hark! hark! the dogs do bark;  
The beggars are coming to town."

"**L**ADY, have you got something you can give a hungry man to eat?" And then the lady went back in the house and in a few minutes returned with a brown paper sack of food. How easy. Why, there was nothing to it! Bob and I laughing left the streets of Graybull, Wyoming, and dined in great

style in the shadow of a cattle car. Egg sandwiches, white radishes, and three stale sweetrolls; washed down with copious amounts of water, gulped from a discarded Folger coffee can. We felt like the progeny of old Epicurus. It was our first meal in two days. Why hadn't we eaten before? Without funds. Why