

- November 6, 1969 -
South wind.

BY HEATON VORSE

When Rocky Taves proposed that the road that is to be built where the old New Haven railroad tracks used to run be named Harry Kemp Way, he christened better than he knew.

Harry Kemp hit Greenwich Village in 1912. He brought with him a gift of words, some of which he wrote but most of which he shouted. He claimed to have set foot on every railroad tie between Seattle and Miami and called himself the Tramp Poet, the bard of the free souls who roam the world at whim.

Harry's one really successful book was autobiographical, called *Tramping on Life*. Its cover had a picture of Harry walking forward between a pair of tracks. On the back was the same pair of tracks with Harry walking away.

HARRY'S EGO

Another thing Harry always had with him was a great big boyish ego. He lived in its shelter. And in a way, that's what made Harry so wonderful. He was wonderful to himself. He was a great poet, an authority on religion and culture, art, name it, Harry knew all about it. He wouldn't talk about it now but perhaps at some future time in private . . .

Harry could read all the master works of the world in their original languages: Homer in Greek, Virgil in Latin, Confucius in Chinese, Moliere in French, Dante in Italian, etc.

Harry was a great athlete. His years of tramping the rails had given him prodigious strength and to prove it, he took a dip in the ocean every day, winter and summer.

And to the ladies Harry was a beautiful disaster. He would hold them in his strong young arms and recite his romantic verses as they swooned in adoration.

Alas! all these things were true only in Harry's imagination. To be sure, he wrote poetry and from time to time, some of it appeared in various publications. But except for one small, privately printed volume, there are no books of his verse to be found.

I paid an unscheduled call on Harry at his room in the John Francis apartments once. He wasn't home. As I waited, I glanced over his library. The Virgil, the Homer, the Dante were there in the original. But they were college trots with the English translation printed either along side or above the text.

There were half a dozen unpublished, unproduced plays in verse in which Don Juan was the protagonist. The Don Juan of the dramas was, of course, Harry himself. And it was here, and here alone, that he was irresistible to the fair sex.

Not that Harry didn't have any real-life romantic attachments. He was married twice, each time to a stunning red head. (His first wife died. I never did find out what happened to Frances McClearnan.)

And, as far as I know, these were the only real attachments he ever made. It was much easier to have dreams of making love and to write them into plays than risk the disappointment of a refusal.

POET WITH TOGA

When he was in his fifties and diabetic, it was hard for him to continue to be the Orpheus of the vagabonds. So he settled permanently in Provincetown and made himself a new image. The Poet of the Dunes. There were wonderful photographs of Harry standing in a fiercely wind-blown toga, gazing sternly out across the sands. And the Advocate of those years printed much of his finer work.

Don't get the idea that Harry

was a phoney or a fraud. He wasn't. He believed he was what he said he was. And that fact, in a way of its own, made it so.

It was rather beautiful. What enriched it was Harry's perpetual Gee Whiz enthusiasm. Everything came to life just because he was there. In the last years of his life, that enthusiasm was devoted to Provincetown, both its past and its present.

And so it was quite fitting that the town voted to accept Rocky's proposal. When the road is bulldozed, laid out, tarmaced and opened to traffic, there will be signs proclaiming it to be Harry Kemp Way.

Maybe on some night in the future, when the moon is dim and shadows do strange things, a lonely driver will see the ghost of Harry Kemp walking down the middle of the road, stepping on the rail road ties that are no longer there.

POET'S CORNER

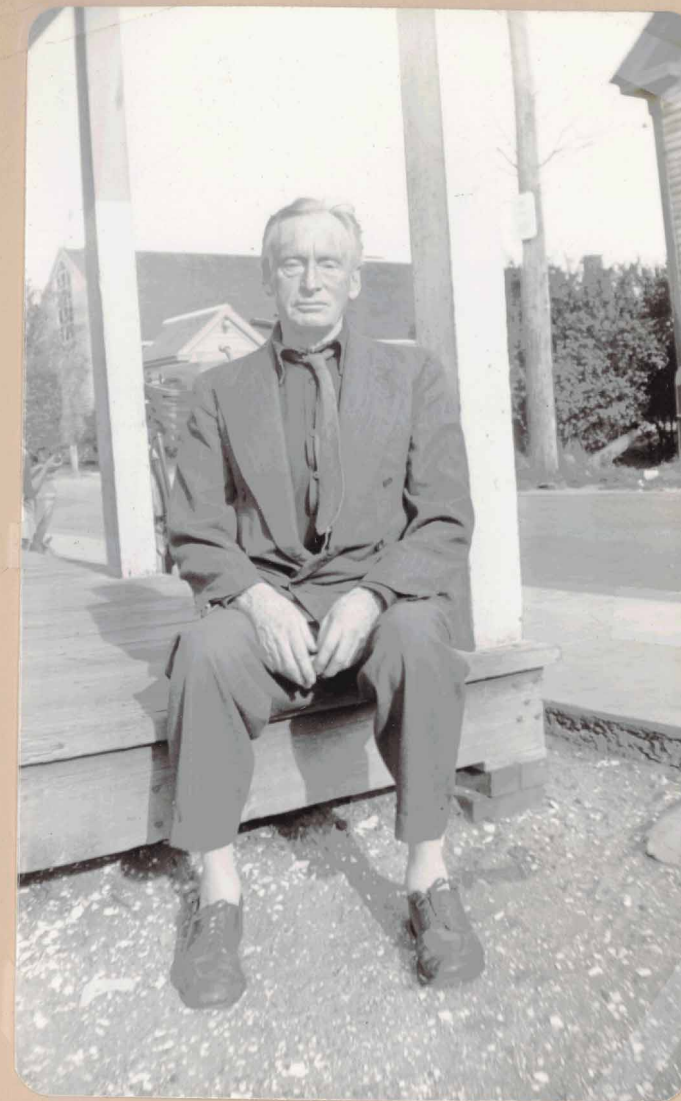
LEISURE'S WEALTH

(Response to Friends who told me I had "wasted" many days in my shack in the Dunes)

I cannot count, as servitors do, a fee,
The recompense those mornings brought to me,
When the sun, using wave-tops as a floor,
Suffused the dunes, and walked in at my door,
With casual riches which he gave away,
Bringing to me the priceless gifts of day!
This Prodigal taught me how fools hoard their gold
To keep till of no use, themselves too old;
The moon, too, with her dancing skirts of cloud,
The wisdom of the morning sun avowed.
Let Business keep to strict and dusty rule—
I would live like a child let out from school.
Next to the Golden Rule for Poets' use
Is Leisure, and the gifts its hours produce!

Dec. 3, 1964

Harry Kemp



Harry Kemp, Poet of the Dunes
Taken in 1950's - Died 1960