

Hill Billies

BY JOHN J. NILES

First Lieutenant, United States Air Service, with the A. E. F.; author of "Singing Soldiers"

Kentucky sketches, with some of the songs they sing as they live their backwoods existence. It is not the story-book version of Kentucky, told by exact novelists who have never been west of Manhattan Transfer—indeed, it is written about myself and my very own family.

EMMET DAUTHER

A. D. 1890

Charley Linktum killed a cat—
Made himself a beaver hat—
Sides wuz bellied—top wuz flat—
When he wore it, folks said "Scat."



DURING his sane moments, Emmet Dauther had made up enough four-line rhymes about Charley Linktum to fill a big book. In fact, they were almost as prevalent and as varied in their situations as the Lord and Lady Algy stories in the British army. Emmet could read and write—for that matter, all the Dauthers (during a period of prosperity now safely past) had been given a chance at the three R's, but the community held him up as an example of excessive education. He was said to be "daft with learnin'." The family might have sent him to a State institution, but this would have been official acceptance of a fact they had been trying to avoid for more than twenty years.

When Emmet became violent, which was in the summer-time as a rule (dog days, according to tradition), he was consigned to an empty corn-crib, where he was fastened with a short length of cow-chain. Here he mumbled over his Charley Linktum rhymes, beat his chains against the floor, and slept, until the "blank look wuz offen his face" and the "spell" was gone. During his semi-daft periods, he turned the pages of the mail-order catalogues, lingering long over the illustrations setting forth the latest French creations in ladies' underthings. It was either this or the melodramatic yarns he read in monthly farm journals

that caused him to spend much of his time thinking about the ladies.

Emmet dreamed of sweethearts—of sparkin'—of spoonin'—of duplicating his brothers' exploits at County Fairs (where a "feller could make up to side-show gals and sech"), enjoying the minute details of each new matrimonial venture the community offered and prophesying the number of shotgun "marryin's" there would be each fall as a result of the scandalous courtin' of the warm weather. As fast as things happened in the community (particularly where his brothers were concerned), he turned the facts into four-line rhymes, often to the discredit of the persons involved in the incident. Folks pitied his half-wittedness, but feared his tongue.

The Dauther family had had time to run down. As youngsters, the boys of the present generation were hard workers, but in manhood they were the "no-countest" whites south of the Mason-Dixon Line. They simply wouldn't work! Sni, the eldest (a perfect type of pot-house politician), lived by leasing a small farm his wife had inherited, leasing it to more industrious farmers who worked it on shares. Minor, Gimpson, and William stayed on the home place, where they loafed from one year to the next. Pet Dauther, the mother of the family (who had some money hidden away in a tin can under the cabin), raised a small kitchen-garden and a few razor-back hogs, and eked out an existence on what she received from two fortunate sources—rentals from a sawmill and a drain-tile works for the use of part of her land as railway-sidings.

Gimpson Dauther, the third born of

Mammy Dauther's brood, was something of a preacher. He was what is known to the outside world as a "hell-fire and eternal damnationist." In his early youth he had attended a "protracted meetin'" up Elkhorn way and "got religion." He had, as had many of our best big-city theologians, gone through various stages of beliefs. Starting out to fight disease, dirt, and the devil, he soon gave up disease and dirt and concentrated his efforts on the devil, and the hell-fire this convenient Gnome passed out to unbelievers. Not that Gimpson worked overhard at preachin'. Not at all! He "supplied vacant pulpits," which meant that he really worked at the business of salvaging souls from hell about once every two months. His stand-in with whatever kind of Deity was most popular at the time—Holyroller, Footwashing, Mount Olivet, Sanctification, etc.—gave him a considerable prestige in the community and raised his actions (illicit liquor notwithstanding) above the reproach of common mortals. His stock sermons were dramatizations of various scenes involving the Children of Israel, Pharoah, Moses, Pharaoh's daughter, the plagues, the passage through the Red Sea, the pillar of fire, Jacob's ladder, etc. To conclude his Jacob's-ladder sermon and bring the sinners up to the "hand-shakin' and religion-gittin' point," he used to sing a song which deserves recording—about finding Jacob's ladder and walkin' right straight up to heaven, etc.

In the early spring of a year not so very long ago, after the Dauther boys and their mother had had a long and heated discussion about the division of the sawmill rentals, it was rumored that Minor, the second born, and William, the fourth born, were leaving home. They were going up to Frankfort to take jobs a lumberman had offered them in a sawmill. On the heels of this news, Mammy Dauther was found dead one morning. Dead! Lying on the clean-washed floor of her lean-to kitchen with a half-prepared breakfast all around her. Minor and William had left the day before. Gimpson was away—"supplyin' a vacant pulpit." Emmet, who had been slowly recovering from one of his wild spells, was found asleep in the corn-crib, unchained. The

crime had been committed with a blunt instrument, presumably a grubbing-hoe handle. It could not be found. Emmet, with the blank look still on his face, was taken into the room and questioned. He sobbed, but was unable to form any coherent sentences. Circumstantial evidence was against him—the wagging tongues of the community said that Mammy Dauther got what she deserved "fur not puttin' her daft Emmie away." But the sheriff was not convinced. Some folks wondered why he didn't "up and arrest Emmet" (Mammy Dauther's favorite son), but when two river-men brought Preacher Gimpson Dauther's body that evening, they knew why. He had undoubtedly fallen off a foot-log and been carried into deep water by an early spring freshet. There were no signs of violence on his body. He had met death by drowning. The leather wallet containing Pet Dauther's savings—the money she'd kept hidden in a tin can under the cabin—was found on Gimpson's body. Minor and William identified it when they returned from Frankfort several days later.

After that, poor daft Emmet spent more time than ever in the corn-crib—beating his chains against the floor and mumbling four-line rhymes about Charley Linktum, while his brother Sni (so named from his snivelling manner) managed the barren acreage and collected the sawmill rentals.

(This song, in its original form, was said to be the composition of an itinerant evangelist from Cincinnati, Ohio, who operated through central and southern Kentucky from 1880 to 1890.)

JACOB'S LADDER

When I find Jacob's ladder, a leadin' up on high—
I'm goin' to climb right up to heaven, so as I'll be there when I die.

Train's a leavin' for heaven town—sinner you better git in—
Can't git there a walkin' as slow as a terrapin.
Can't git there a flyin', but you have to climb and swim,
If you want to join the holy brethren, a glorifyin' him.

Holy days, shoutin' days, days of endless joy and praise,

When you find Jacob's ladder a leadin' up on high,
You can climb right up to heaven so as you'll
be there when you die.

2d Verse

Keep me from the wailin' water, keep me from
the flood—
Save me in the day of Judgment with your
precious blood.

(One will notice that the point of interest wanders from the Ladder and the Flood to the holy days of Judgment. This is by no means disconcerting to the backwoods preacher or his congregation, who seem to gain "edification" from any spiritual references—no matter how disconnected they may be.)

MOONSHINE

Mammy Bradley knocked the ashes from her pipe and, reaching for a double handful of unshelled beans, continued the preparation of the evening meal. They were spotted with red-and-brown patches and for some unknown reason were called "lazy wife pole-beans."

Edie (who, in spite of being quite "growed up" for her fifteen years, was very bashful before folks) helped out by encouraging a fire to burn under an iron kettle of water, into which Mammy Bradley would presently deposit the red-and-brown beans, a generous portion of green corn cut off the cob, a half-dozen onions, some peeled Irish potatoes, and a hunk of sow belly. For the Bradleys had been honored by the visitation of a soldier-boy friend of Jebbie's—a disabled soldier boy like Jebbie, from up Louisville way. The visitor was teaching Jebbie and his sister Edie to read and write, and incidentally profiting by the air and the simple life of the mountains in his recovery from the effects of the war. This was the third time the soldier boy had visited the Bradleys since Jebbie came home "frum soldierin'."

Mammy Bradley had sent two sons to war—Carl and Jebbie. They were long, lanky fellows, with a drawling accent and a natural instinct for firearms. They knew from long experience all about trigger squeeze—no one had to tell them not to jerk the trigger—they were natural-born marksmen. One night, early in October, 1918, a stray 77 fell among a ration party and private Carl Bradley was badly hit. He was dead before the medics had time to dress his wounds. In spite of this and the withered left arm Jebbie came home with, Mammy Bradley was never known to find fault with the war. It had supplied her an endless theme for conversation, and it had taught

Jebbie how to make barbed-wire entanglements and submerge them under water.

"Yep, my Carl wuz killed a hawlin' vittals fur his pardners, and Jebbie's left arm—hit's only a skimshon o' what it uster be." (Mammy Bradley pointed her remarks by gestures she made with a "fly-bush" held in her right hand.) "Once I hear tell, Mister John, that the same fellers as hires revenuers wuz in cahoots on the war, and now they've made a passel o' laws a causin' city-folk to drink more moonshine liquor as ever. In the war, Jebbie learned how to nail snag-wire to saw bucks and sink 'em under water. So when I think o' our island with snag-wire all around it and count the notches on Pappy Bradley's gun, I says I'm even."

On Saturday afternoons in the summertime, before the boys went away "fur soldierin'," Pappy Bradley used to drive the family up to the cross-roads ("ef he war sure they wouldn't be no slew foots about")—drive up to the cross-roads where Charley Smithers had his barbecues. Over a smouldering trench some twenty feet long, hogs were roasted, and sometimes the carcass of a sheep (too old for breeding purposes) would be browned to a delicious crisp under the professional eye of Nip Foracre. Nip and Charley were in cahoots on the barbecue. Near by was a crude roofless dancing-pavilion (sometimes used as a rostrum for political speakers). On a raised portion of the floor sat Patch Sexton, the fiddler—famous for his "spirut lore" and appetite for corn liquor and his disconnected, pointless dance "chunes," valuable only for their rhythmic flow. Patch's boast was that with an occasional "nip o' moon and a hunk o' barbecued meat," he could play from now until the lights went out and never play the same "chune twicet."

Occasionally the fiddler would strike up music that called for a square dance. Then the old folks would join the dancers, and Charley Smithers would "call the figgers" in a loud and officious voice. So on the rough floor of Charley Smithers's dancing-pavilion, the barbecuers danced and sang "Johnnie, When You Goin' To Marry Me," a composition of unknown origin with too many verses to recount, to Patch's accompaniment whenever they had breath enough to sing and dance at the same time.

As soon as the sun went down the boys of the community "sparked their gals." Those hill billies with lard in their hair—breaking out new pairs of "yallar store shoes," bought out of mail-order catalogues—sashayed through the oddest versions of ballroom-dancing, sparking their gals all the while. They were bashful fellows, until they tapped the half-pint bottles they carried or made a trip across the road to Benny Benkirk's saloon. Then they danced with more abandon, sparked more openly, and ate huge helpings of barbecued meat and burgoo.

Benny Benkirk ran the kind of place we used to read about in stories of our wild southwest—it was the only place in the county Uncle Tommy, the sheriff, was "mos' near afeared to go into." The bar, which was the front room of a double-den cabin, lacked all the glittering vulgar gewgaws employed by the city saloon-keepers as stage-settings to the orgies of their customers. Around the walls were rough-hewn benches. The more wide-awake drinkers leaned or stood up to a rickety wooden affair reminiscent of other such furniture only in that it possessed a foot-rail. Here Pappy Bradley loafed while the family partook of the barbecue. Here Pappy Bradley arranged with Benny Benkirk for the delivery and acceptance of certain alcoholic beverages, made by hand on moonlight nights, without benefit of stamp-tax or test. Old man Feather Whiskers, the local assistant to the county assessor, usually dropped in on the boys at Benny Benkirk's during the Saturday-night barbecues, and Buffalo Bill, the road-mender; and Sni Dauther, the pot-house politician, and Big Black Jim Cable, the log house carpenter, who had been hit in the mouth

with a bottle after one of Charley Smithers's barbecue-dances, and whose speech had never quite recovered.

Mammy Bradley objected to the barbecues on the supposition that among the merrymakers there were some informers: "Folks as tipped off the revenuers. The Jennings's wuz raided twicet in one year and always right after one of Charley Smithers's barbecues." Still Pappy Bradley had to sell his liquor and the trip to the barbecue brought him in contact with one of his best customers, Mr. Benkirk.

After Jeb and Carl went away for soldierin', the three remaining members of the family seemed to lose interest in the barbecues—they stayed "to home," Mammy Bradley sharing with her husband and her young daughter Edie the tasks left undone when the boys were drafted up at the court-house.

It had long been known to certain old-timers that Sam'l Bradley operated a moonshine-still on a little island in some marsh-land formed by backwater from the Ohio River. It had even become known as Sam'l Bradley's island. The possession of this island had been the cause of the Bradley-Hawkins feud back in 1900. (Land boom in Oklahoma attracted the Hawkinsees just in time to prevent bloodshed.) It was around this little island (not more than 350 feet in circumference) that Jebbie skilfully laid the man-trapping snag-wire to save his father from capture in the very act of manufacturing "moonshine."

The actual details of the raid, which, by the way, followed a trip to one of Charley Smithers's barbecues, were never discussed. Whether it was revenuers, hi-jackers, or local enemies, no one really knew. It all happened at night. Little Edie prayed. Mammy Bradley stood in the door of their cabin, gun in hand, ready to protect herself and her daughter against "the furriners," while Jebbie and Sam'l Bradley were out on the island "pepperin' them as wuz caught in the wire." Following that night new notches were put on Sam'l Bradley's gun and the family "laid off stillin' fur a spell."

Second helpings from the iron pot had been heaped on the plates. Corn pone, sorghum, and sassafras tea had been

served. Two flat-bellied hounds crawled out from under the cabin to lap up their share of the leavings. A coal-oil lamp was lighted. Corn-cob pipes were filled from a handful of leaf tobacco Sam'l Bradley kept in his "tobaccie-box." The tree-frogs and katydids whirred and croaked to one another outside.

A foggy stillness moved up close to the little cabin. Miss Edie took to clearin' away the dishes while Jebbie and his soldier-boy friend from "up Louisville way" were poring over a copy-book, Jebbie writing and spelling in an undertone. Mammy and Pappy Bradley sat on opposite sides of the fireplace, watching the last few embers of the fire whiten into ashes. It was a beloved little chair Mammy Bradley sat in—a rocker with a split-hickory seat. Carl had made it the winter before he went away "fur soldierin'." As she rocked she seemed to be looking at something far away—something the others couldn't see. Perhaps it was a group of stretcher-bearers miring around ankle-deep in that pasty French mud, trying to get a wounded boy to a near-by dressing-station as painlessly as possible. The wounded boy was her own son—Private Carl Bradley. The ground was littered with canteens and rations, for Carl had been hit while "hawlin' vittals

fur his pardners." The stretcher-bearers stumbled through the darkness; they did the best they could, cursing the mud, the sink-holes, and the wire, but Carl—Carl went west before they got him to the dressing-station.

"Yep, if it be true that them fellers as hires revenuers wuz in cahoots on the war—them an' us is even. Sam'l Bradley, do you hear, we're even!"

Sam'l Bradley was asleep.

Oh, Johnnie, when you goin' to marry me—tell me, Johnnie, tell me Johnnie, do.

Oh, Sally, when you goin' to marry me—tell me, Sally, tell me Sally, do.

I'll marry you by the light o' the moon; if the moon stays dark, I'll marry you soon,

Oh, Johnnie, when you goin' to marry me—tell me, Johnnie, tell me Johnnie, do.

Oh, Johnnie, when you goin' to go to town, tell me, Johnnie, tell me Johnnie, do.

Oh, Sally, when you goin' to go to town—tell me, Sally, tell me Sally, do.

I'll go to town by the light o' the moon; if the moon stays dark, I'll have to go soon,

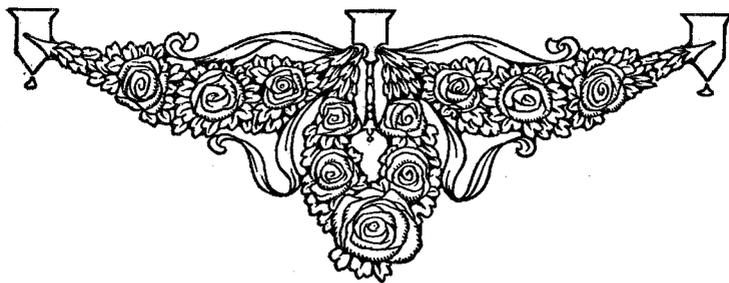
Oh, Johnnie, when you goin' to go to town, tell me, Johnnie, tell me Johnnie, do.

Oh, Johnnie, when you goin' to cook your mash, tell me, Johnnie, tell me Johnnie, do.

Oh, Sally, when you goin' to cook your mash—tell me, Sally, tell me Sally, do.

I'll cook my mash by the light o' the moon, if the moon stays dark, I'll cook it soon,

Oh, Johnnie, when you goin' to cook your mash, tell me, Johnnie, tell me Johnnie, do.





Sing a Song of Jazz

BY VALMA CLARK

Author of "The Director's Brother," "Candlelight Inn," etc.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARVÉ STEIN



ANGELA paused on the great staircase, and with a bare white arm cooling itself against the mahogany rail, looked down at the gathering of the Ladies' Betterment League which was filling her grandmother's three huge parlors. There were the sheen of restless silks and the gabble of many voices. The ladies had chosen this New Year's Eve of 1921 to initiate a clean-up programme in the town; and, congregated here in their holiday best, they were awaiting the returns.

Angela's moving eye collected the entire assemblage with scorn. At the spectacle of Peter Harned making himself agreeable to that little busybody, Mrs. Alvah Hutchins, her gaze paused. Couldn't gram pull even a hen party without including Peter to rustle chairs and tote

trays? Bah! It was Peter—Peter—too much Peter!

"The Black Horse Tavern first," came Mrs. Carmody's bass voice, drowning out the lighter chatter. "To have a place like that open in the same county with our daughters—our granddaughters—is contamination! I told Sheriff Hilton to report to me here directly after the raid." She stood in a little space respectfully cleared for her. A stationary figure in a rich brocaded black velvet, with a diamond brooch at her throat and a gold watch on her flat bosom, with a bony, firm face darkly moustached, she seemed the pivot for their pattern of shifting and excitable femininity. That nervous little Miss Trask in nose-glasses and purple changeable silk was her right-elbow woman. . . .

Peter first, then the others, discovered Angela. She stood, a little slim girl, with her pale, pointed face cast down, and