

when you say "Winabijou"; the native of Menominee when you inquire about the McDonald Boys; the coed, when you ask her to sing "Minnie the Mermaid"; the Wall Street broker when quizzed about the fabled Chauncy Depew; and the GI, when pumped about Kilroy.

Everyone belongs to some folk group, or to more than one, you and I too, no matter how urban and sophisticated we consider ourselves. The college campus and the district high school overflow with legends of eccentric professors, feats of cheating, traditions of the virgin coed, stories of fatal fraternity initiations, folk-songs of amour, admonitions of the Dean of Women, textbook inscrip-

tions, secret cries. In the folk ideas of such groups we can perceive traditional values, *tabus*, obsessions, humors, which bind its members in tight fraternities, and divide American society into many chambers. It is time we began exploring these chambers.

At all odds, folklore needs to be gathered and interpreted with insight, integrity, and some sense of social meanings. In Europe folklore scholarship has long enjoyed prestige, and contributed illustrious names to the humanities, from the brothers Grimm to Sir James Frazer. In the United States it is rapidly forfeiting the respect of most serious students of the American scene.

FOLKLORE AND THE ARTIST

BY JAMES STEVENS

ISWING on Dr. Dorson's charge, "Stevens is a badly mixed up man [on Paul Bunyan]," and bat it right back at him. His confusion is between the tasks of the anthropologist and those of the artist with folklore. To illustrate the distinction: Here in the Puget Sound country is Dr. Erna Gunther, head of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Washington, who has labored effec-

tively to collect genuine items from the perishing folklore of the region's Indian tribes; and here in the person of the author, is an old weaver in the ancient art of tale-making who devises patterns of his own from the lore of woodsmen. The scientist of long technical training and experience will use folklore to reflect vital phases of human tribes in times past. The artist adopts folklore for the work of his

imagination. He sees Paul Bunyan as substance for art, in the tradition of Twain with King Arthur's court, of Byron with Don Juan, of Marlowe with Faustus, of Homer with Odysseus.

On that great way I make my trifling tracks. And I trail with Conrad:

Impressed by the aspect of the world the thinker plunges into ideas, the scientist into facts. . . . Confronted by the same enigmatical spectacle the artist descends within himself and in that lonely region of stress and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of his appeal. . . . He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder. . . .

So much for my main difference with Dr. Dorson. There are other points of his argument on which I have to go to bat against him. And on some prime points, of course, I would have to support him. He is a scientific authority on folklore. I have never pretended to be a folklorist. For 35 years I've been reciting and writing tales of Paul Bunyan, tales of my own invention. This is now my theme.

In terms of real folklore, the only document on Paul Bunyan is a poem of sorts, just as the only evidence on John Henry is found in versions of a song. The poem was published in April 1914, in *The American Lumber-*

man. The author was Douglas Malloch, a Lake States lecturer and versifier on lumbering topics. He knew the life of the shanty boys and their lore. His pickings for the verses of *The Round River Drive* were from stories that were told in the pineries about Paul Bunyan long before 1914, unquestionably. The evidence is inside the poem. The rest is hearsay. I believe that the name of Paul Bunyan became a common bunk-shanty peg for coddling among the French and Irish lumberjacks of the Saginaw in the 1860s or earlier, and then faded from familiar use in the 1880s, along with the lore of Boone, Crockett, Bridger, Fink and other folklore heroes of the Frontier. I simply believe this. I don't have to prove it.

Now again to the record. Soon after the publication of the Malloch poem, the Red River Lumber Company of Minnesota revived the old Paul Bunyan joshes in trade-paper advertising. The stock for this was meager indeed. Fresh whoppers were made up about Paul and his Big Blue Ox. They were told in terms that rang true to the old "pinetops," and they were illustrated with drawings that were never out of kilter with the work of men in the woods.

The prime mover in this phase of the revival of Paul Bunyan was William B. Laughead, who had come up from boyhood in the pine plains to be

an advertising man. He invented Johnny Inkslinger, Brimstone Bill, Sourdough Sam and the Seven Axmen. He improved the character of the Big Blue Ox. Then, just as the comic writers from 1830 to 1860 popularized the simple original lore of Boone, Crockett and Fink, the advertising of the Red River Lumber Company spread the Bunyan revival.

I first heard the name of Paul Bunyan in the California-Oregon pine country, when hoboing took me to the Mt. Shasta wilderness in 1910. There I worked a string of pack mules from a camp of the McCloud River Lumber Company. The camp harbored several ancient Lake States pinetops. At odd times I heard them swap old-time bunk-shanty whoppers. I learned such terms as "highbanker" from their gab. I heard about "Silver Jack," a name borne by seven different pine-woods pluguglies, according to Lee J. Smits. And I heard about Paul Bunyan and his ox. I was then seventeen and had held my first woods job, in Idaho, five years earlier. Old lore and characters did not interest me much. Real wonders were rising in the world. Men were flying. The Panama Canal was building. There were submarines, and the wireless. The Ford was here. So were amazing new logging machines. Ox logging? Go back and sit down!

The Shasta region was good log-

ging country, as it still is. I went back to it often, and in the summer of 1916 I began to hear new gags — "sells," we called them then — on the Paul Bunyan theme. At the time, I did not stop to think why, but now I know that it was mainly because the Red River Lumber Company moved to Westwood in California. The pinetops who came along on the move were already well-primed with the revived lore and with the new stories. The company's product was stamped "Paul Bunyan Pine." Hobo loggers ("go-about," "short-stakers") made the rounds from Westwood to McCloud, Weed, Klamath Falls (Ore.), and to other pine towns. Then Paul and Babe began to be talked about in the long-log country — in such spots as the Ohop Valley, Dr. Dorson, under the snows of Mt. Rainier. I was still moving around. In January 1918, I was in France with the old Third Oregon infantry regiment. Before long, I saw Paul Bunyan tales in print for the first time. The medium was *The Stars and Stripes'* letters section. I wrote a ballad, a sonnet and a lyric for the paper, but no Bunyana. Folklore remained trifling, old-style windjamming in my view of life and letters.

There stands my early experience with Paul Bunyan, as fortified by knowledge gained after 1925, when my first book was published. I wrote

the dozen tales of *Paul Bunyan* on order, with some amazement that the subject could interest a publisher, without any notion that I might be crowding in on scientific folklorists. The Introduction, on source material, was written last, by request.

II

In all the dreams and hopes of my years of hard labor in camps and mills, Paul Bunyan had no part. Dr. Dorson implies that I've pretended that the loggers I knew spent most of their spare time on Paul Bunyan stories. What I meant to indicate, in my 1925 Introduction, was that a Paul Bunyan bunkhouse service was a rare thing, which happened only when a rare bard was present. In my time in the woods there was incomparably more talk about the Wobblies, the rebels who were then blazing away everywhere in the timber. And, as I've noted, the young loggers were preoccupied with dreams of Fords and flying machines. The gabby logger was commonly one who talked in company mainly to present himself as a wise, well-traveled and entirely admirable fellow. Among the men of the woods whom I met through twenty years in thirty or more camps, there were very few who presented themselves as bullies, drunks, whore-masters, gambling fools — or as liars. Owning a decent respect for the opin-

ion of mankind, the loggers of my experience were careful about telling tall tales.

There was little time for them. Where I worked, the logging went on for a full ten hours per day, six days a week. Travel time between camp and logging works would use another hour. Watering, cuffing, harnessing and unharnessing the horses (four on a slip-tongue rig) would take still another. And after a day's work, most loggers would read, write letters or play some quiet bunkhouse cribbage. The drunkards were usually men who had seen better days. Frequently they were well educated. Many were of great help to me in my poetical ambitions. One was an Annapolis man who worked as a camp time-keeper between drunks.

The work was the thing. There was little violence. In all my twenty years of logging, I never saw a fight between loggers on the job or in camp. I even recall the timber-town saloons as peaceful places. The fist-and-boot battles and the Big Drunks of loggers were few and tame — compared to the brags of ring-tailed roarers and the pages of popular fiction. With the fighting Wobblies the most violent uprisings were in the mining towns, in the crop camps, and in far-off Massachusetts.

Dr. Dorson has also gone astray on his notion of obscenity as a common

characteristic of loggers' lore. It is true that the language of the woods is foul and profane, as commonly roared, but folklore has its peculiar and definite categories. Sexual prowess has long been represented in Western work camps by the imaginary One Eye Riley. The loggers have said little about him, while the crop campers play him up to this day. Paul Bunyan was purely and simply a giant of the work, the woods boss of woods bosses, and no more. He was made in America, from American exuberance, but no one has ever claimed that exuberance was strictly an American quality — certainly the Finns and Poles have their tall tale heroes too, but they weren't produced by the particular rigors of the American Frontier, or logging camps, or by the expansive growth of the American peoples and folk groups. (There is a difference, too, in folklore brought to America and given an American twist, and folklore produced in America by the peculiar problems of the American environment.) But more to the point, Dr. Dorson wrongs Paul even more sorely by putting him in the scatological, uriniferous and genitonal categories of folklore. The dreamers and saints in the forests outnumber the hellions by far. The woods were always full of poets. The genuine Bunyan folklore is forest poesy.

Such was my view of life and lore

in logging by February 1924, when I sat close to a stove in a log-pond shack and tackled my first writing on Paul Bunyan.

A letter of inquiry to H. L. Mencken in November of 1923 brought an invitation for an article for his new magazine, *THE AMERICAN MERCURY*. I sweated out an acceptable essay, but held on to my job as lumber-sorter on a sawmill green-chain. For ten tough, lean years I had given my soul to poetry, but against all my will, the seed of Paul Bunyan began to sprout and grow. Through a week I slugged green pine off conveyor chains and piled it on trucks by day; then, shucking mulehide mittens I took pen in hand each night to write "The Black Duck Dinner." This was my text from folklore:

"Paul Bunyan's tarp was so big that when he spread 'er out ducks comin' over often mistook it for a lake."

Mr. Mencken took the story, and also brought it to the attention of Blanche Knopf. She gave me an order for enough Paul Bunyan tales to make a book, so I quit the sawmill and descended into that "lonely region of stress and strife" where artists labor and conspire. As I saw it, my pursuit was a venture in the ancient way of letters. I wrote without folklore in view, looking instead for the tracks of

Hawthorne, Irving, and especially Joel Chandler Harris, who made up stories from one folk fable, "The Tar Baby."

III

Dr. Dorson is on my side when he swings his argument against any "chauvinist or fascist conception of folklore." In 1931, writing *The Saginaw Paul Bunyan*, I said it this way:

Paul Bunyan is one hero of myth who kept kindness in his heart. This sublime quality makes him live on from the wastes of forgotten time, where selfish heroes have perished, or have achieved remembrance only as symbols of the monstrous forces that may be embodied in mankind. Paul Bunyan owned the Lincoln spirit.

And I am with him against commercial exploitation of Paul and Babe to boost tourist trade and promote liars' contests. My own work with this material has taken me back to the woods, away from fictioneering. For eleven years, I have kept Paul Bunyan growing in the forest towns and camps of the Pacific Northwest. One example: Four years ago, the schools of Shelton, a town of 5000 that lives amid 270,000 acres of trees on Washington's Olympic Peninsula, put on a mammoth outdoor pageant with a Paul Bunyan setting and forestry theme. I wrote the script. In that area, the forests are managed on a plan to

balance cutting with growth. There Paul is still a logger, but he also grows trees and fights fire. I could tell more of the same, but maybe it is what Dr. Dorson calls "cutesy." I only know that Paul Bunyan is powerful at helping to make forestry popular.

I agree with Dorson's contention, "There is no such thing as the lore of the nation, or of regions, but only the lore of groups." So I say that even the most free-writing fictioneer must feel bound to leave Paul Bunyan in the woods and among loggers in stories about him. Esther Shephard started the fashion of hanging any old whopper on Paul Bunyan in the name of "folklore." In my view, her book is a prime example of what Dorson calls "claptrap collections." It is a conglomeration of the Malloch poem (without credit), the Laughead tales, and a gob of newspaper and trade-journal contributions, rewritten in a preposterous "loggers' vernacular." It begins with a tale that is part of the Old Stormalong lore. It takes Paul Bunyan out of the woods time and again — once making him a wheat man with a threshing machine — and it wraps Puget Sound Indian lore about him near the end. Ben Botkin and other professors have exceeded the worst of the Shephard *Paul Bunyan*, however.

Dr. Dorson has already exposed Botkin for his use of the Library of

Congress as a trash-collection agency. Most of the pages of his *Treasury* represent little more than the whimsies swapped by drugstore cowboys and the printed maunderings of the boozy hacks who infested the Frontier, from Cumberland Gap to the Golden Gate. What Botkin prints on Paul Bunyan is scandalous. One example is a revolting whopper about bedbugs that grew so big Paul's loggers called them *bedcats*. Dr. Botkin also takes Paul Bunyan out of the woods — to be a giant freak on a Southern pipeline! His book reminds me of the squirming mass of worms to be dug from the right spot behind any rotting, abandoned barn.

I will even go a short way with Dorson on his objection to the writer who uses folklore as material for his art, when the stories reveal no life in

depth as the source and scene of the lore itself. But when I read Malloch's rhymes —

We put one hundred million feet
On skids that winter. Hard to beat,
You say it was? It was some crew.
We took it off one forty, too.

— I am at home, in the old life of the woods. Go from Malloch to the poems of Sandburg and Frost on Paul Bunyan themes and you gain art, though you lose life. But the art, you may be sure, will thrive. And in due time, Paul Bunyan should find his Homer or his Mark Twain. As for the Paul Bunyan lore that is the specific concern of social anthropology and other science and history, Malloch went far in its compilation and Laughead more than completed it. The rest is art, and fake folklore.

TRIOLET

BY ISABELLA GARDNER

The bad die old
Kept quick by sin
The good are sooner cold
Though they be good as gold
The good can't win
The bad die old
Kept quick by sin