

THE UPLIFT ON THE FRONTIER

BY JAMES STEVENS

THE pioneer outlaws and harlots of the Golden West and that glorified farmhand, the cowboy, have been so vastly celebrated in American legend that every schoolboy knows about them, and the pioneer farmer, trader and missionary have had their shares of glory too, but the pioneer laborer remains unhonored and unsung. Yet it was his sweat that really won the West—his strong and untiring muscles that cleared off the primeval forest, bridged the rivers, tunneled the mountains, and laid the shining lines of rail. For one argonaut butchered by the Indians or lost in the deserts, for one cowboy trampled or frozen on his lonely vigil, there were a thousand loggers done to death in the woods, and a thousand miners sacrificed under the earth, and a thousand "savages" wrecked and wiped out in the railroad construction camps.

"Savages" is what they called themselves. It was, indeed, a savage life out there at the edge of civilization, and they delighted in the fact. They were men of primitive impulses and desires—barbarians thrown off from the docile herd. They were cynical of the benefits of democracy and scornful of its laws, but fearful of its confinements. Regimentation was loathsome to them, and seemed impossible. They preferred rough camps to houses, the open trail to paved streets, liberty to security. Worked cruelly hard, more often than not ill-used, they yet felt themselves to be free men and rejoiced in their freedom.

That was fifteen years ago, ten years ago, even five years ago. The wild West lingered among these savages long after the last argonaut had become a town boomer,

and the last cowboy had gone into the movies. But the savage, too, is now only a memory. The uplift has reached out its long arm and brought him to grace. He is "civilized." He lives in a house. He has gone on the water-wagon. He wears store clothes. He reads the newspapers. He goes to see Douglas Fairbanks and Bill Hart. A few short years have completely reformed him. He is no more the outlaw that he was. He has been reduced to the common level of American workingman.

I myself have shared his transformation with him, for I have been a common laborer in the Northwest for fifteen years, and remain a laborer today. I had behind me a boyhood amid gentler scenes when I took to the wilds, and its influence, perhaps, is strong upon me now, but while I worked and roistered with the savages I was genuinely one of them. I lived in grading camps, box-cars and jungles, and liked it. I was a team-hand, a muleteer. I graduated from the gay-cat class, and won my tribal name: Appanoose Jimmie. Now I set down some memories of those old days, and some notes upon the new ones.

II

One April night in 1909 I crawled from the trucks of a dining-car in Pocatello, Idaho, and joined a band that was headed for a railroad job in Montana. We gathered in a saloon, and the ones who had money bought amusement for us all. I knew some of them; the others had rambled in from the East and South, where they had wintered.

The bar was in a squalid room, but I would not have traded it for a palace

chamber. The smoke-grimed ceiling, the spotted and streaked walls, and the rows of kegs on the floor made the glitter of the bar itself seem only the richer and warmer. There the swaying, gesticulating, stamping mass of muleteers in dark suits and round-topped, curly-rimmed hats—the uniform of the tribe—bawled out news, stories and plans. I, the youngling, was silent, of course. I stood at the end of the bar, downing foul whisky with the rest and proudly dispensing with any chaser. The alcohol added a crimson flame to the glory in my soul. I was among heroes! In this band was Hard Line Billy, who could crack a bottle with a leather line flung twenty feet, and Poker Tom Davis, the champion poker player of all the camps. Also there was Red Grabby, who, as a walking-boss, had commanded camps of two hundred men. These were of the nobility. But Paddy the Devil, I thought, was the king of them all. He was hammer-chinned, light-footed, powerful. His piratical countenance—all sinister shadows of thick eyebrows, Indian eyes and twirled moustachios—and his fame as a battler gave me an impression of heroic personality. I had heard tales of riots in camps, jungles and saloons, where good men fell or fled before his passionate attack, his shattering fists. He wore a twenty-foot lash wound around his waist. And the tribe called him Paddy the Devil.

While I worshiped I snatched what sense I might from the racketing talk. As I remember, there was little that was vile spoken. They talked rather of wars with John Yegg, roving thief and enemy, with John Law and John Farmer, and with the scissor-bill, the settled laborer of the towns. I caught bits of history about the building of the Milwaukee, the Midland Valley and the North Bank, where they had helped grade the road-beds. . . . The glasses clinked, the smoke thickened, the voices became an unintelligible roar. . . .

Paddy the Devil had gripped my arm. "Not 'nother shot, Appanoose; you gotta keep your legs to make the three o'clock

rattler." And then he bawled to the others, "Come on, you savages; let's perform!"

Here haziness intervenes, and I recollect but dimly a parade through the redlight district, where I heard a shrill of female voices and saw painted faces and thrilling eyes. Then the railroad yard.

I was awakened at dawn from my slumber in a gondola-car loaded with coal. The train was on a siding in a sagebrush desert. Paddy the Devil heaved me to my feet, shaking me roughly, "Yay, Ned," he growled. "Ditch the sleep! The shack's fixed, and we ride an empty to Lima."

We all left the gondola and crawled into an empty box-car. Bottles were passed around, and we stretched out for another sleep. When I awoke again beer and food had been procured at some town, and the savages were eating lustily. When the bread and canned salmon had been consumed there were many bottles of beer left, and with the emptying of these came stories and songs.

Songs of toil and stories of toil, of wanderings, sprees and battles without rules, of hardships, privations and persecutions that marked the lowest range of life's miseries. But even these were told for laughter. I remember most clearly Jailhouse Whitey hoisting his shirt to display the hideous scars made in a Southern prison camp—"Got a 'riginal tattoo, I has, b'god—," Paddy the Devil describing a battle with five loggers who had assailed him with beer bottles, and Memphis Fogarty telling of the murders of Negroes in Mississippi levee camps, and their burial with dead mules in the dumps of levee fills.

We reached Lima, the division point, at sundown. We bought supplies and went to the jungles—always a sheltered spot by some stream, where crude cooking-ware was used and left by various bands. There we prepared the "call." This, a strictly jungle dish, is composed of mashed potatoes, bits of bacon and onions. On call, coffee and bread we feasted. We drank the coffee from old tin cans and ate the call

from cans or boards, using whittled-out paddles for spoons. I remember that the last two savages to eat sat facing each other—the can in which the call had been cooked between their legs—and solemnly took turns in scooping up mouthfuls.

The night was spent in the back room of a saloon, where we had drunk enormous quantities of beer earlier in the evening. The next day we proceeded to Armstead, the headquarters for the new railroad. Armstead, then a village of many brothels and saloons, one hotel and one store, was built at the junction of two narrow valleys. There were new warehouses and sidings by the main line, and alongside them were great piles of material for the building of the railroad. Dust from freight wagons rolled all day up the slopes of the bald, wrinkled hills. The streets streamed with men, and as soon as we left the yards we met other members of our tribe. Now we felt the excitement of the enterprise, and as we jammed into the first saloon the talk was all of the work before us, of the wages to be made, of the virtues of the various camps. Gamblers and yeggs worked through the saloons, seeking possible victims, and on the fringes of the mob cowboys stood marveling at the rushing, violent life that left them without honor in their own country.

The hard-rock men, or dynos, and the team-hands ruled for the moment; their hard labor of ten hours a day would in time thrust twin rails of steel ninety miles up a valley and into the heart of a region rich in metals. For this they would receive a wage, but the reward they claimed was a short day or so of riotous drinking, brawling and primitive amour, and then a free ride to a new job. If they considered their souls at all they thought them as useless as neckties; they had no politics, nor any religion; they were as remote from the amenities of civilization as a tribe of Neanderthals. But they had a sharp instinct for the drama and color of their violent life, and a sense of the simple usefulness of pioneer labor. So they lived

greatly in their own light. They did not want salvation or betterment. And as they had only contempt for the prosperity of tamer people and were wary of the law they did not tamper with others.

Considering them austere I might admit that the savages were detestable fellows and that the suppression of their old life has been a noble work. But the memory of my experiences with them flashes on my mind in hot streaks of light. I knew them when I knew the fresh fire of youth, and this fire is ecstasy of the flesh. Even now I do not shudder at their brutalities, or at the blood on their hands from knifings, clubbings and fist-fights. No, I still feel a thrill of elemental passion in the memory of the pickhandle duel between Paddy the Devil and Keen Heel Sam at Leyden Brothers' camp on the Armstead road.

That was the hey-day of the savages and I was in the thick of it, and happy every hour. Squalor and dirt were in the camps, of course, and the work was hard and the hours long. But the savages themselves, for all their brutality, were amusing and amiable fellows, and life among them went with a rush. The day-ends were for stories and songs around the fire—vast, heroic, incredible epics that have yet to find their poet. At that time I had read nothing save an occasional newspaper for a year and a half; when I began reading again, a year later, I had almost forgotten how. So the tales that I heard were literature to me, and I took them in with immense satisfaction. "Blow-ins" came on pay-day—colossal, barbaric revels, but short, and, I believe, not harmful. It was the life of overgrown boys. It was hooky every day.

III

It was, of course, doomed to perish. The frontier kept sliding back; civilization kept sneaking in. Every time they finished a new line of rail or cleared a new section of woods the savages were pushed further into the wilderness, and soon or late they were bound to come to its end.

But it was not natural forces working from within but a spirit working from without that broke up the old life and converted the care-free savage into a sober workingman. I believe that it was none other than Henry Ford who made the first inroads. Ford's ideas, put into practice in his automobile plant, penetrated to the camps very quickly, and there they seemed to arouse discontent in men who had been quite unaffected by the prodding of radicalism. One began to hear strange doctrines preached, some of them subversive. The savages began to be class-conscious, to consider their woes, to demand relief. The men of the crafts and the common laborers joined forces "for the common interest"; there was talk of unionism, of one big union. Newspapers appeared and ideas were mulled in the evenings. The old songs and stories were heard no more; the savages began to learn shame and aspiration.

Then came the war, and with it the uplift—and the end was in sight. The camps began to be penetrated by the prophets of all sorts of new gospels—preachers of patriotism, sacrifice, service, order, morality. The bordellos were closed; the saloons came under a strange and disconcerting ban; silence fell upon the once loud and happy savages. It began to appear that almost everything that had made the old life charming to them was wrong—that it was wrong to go on a bust on pay-day, wrong to get drunk and fight, wrong to squander money. The camps began to grow decorous and dull. It was a tremendous change, and there was something unnatural about it. But it lasted.

In 1917 after spending some seasons in the woods, I returned to the construction camps. I rode the freights to Kansas City, and from there I shipped out to a tunnel job in Wyoming. Then I worked in the Utah copper mines and on a reclamation project. I was driving mules on California highway work when I was snared in the draft. I found the life of all the camps profoundly changed. Everyone was covered with the scum of city labor, and its tribal

traditions and vitality and the innocence of its old spirit were smothered by the aggressive righteousness of the towns. In camp the savages complained; in the jungles they were surly and depressed. Everywhere I heard: "I'm goin' to get the hell outta this an' join the Army." Most of them did. With the halting of development work others drifted into the new war enterprises. Troops guarded the railroads and there was a general suspicion of all strangers. The savages settled down. The saloons were finally closed and the last tribal bond was broken.

Few of the old team-hands have returned to construction work. The grading camps are now simply places of labor. In the logging camps and sawmill towns the old spirit breathes only feebly. Ancient loggers keep alive the memory of Paul Bunyan, their legendary hero, and stories and songs survive from the primitive days, but the younger loggers are all of a much different stamp. They still have the instincts that make them scorn the duller trades and usually they are hard-muscled and exuberant of spirit, but they were not yet men when the new regimentation began and they have been moulded and guided by its influences. They are no longer savages. They are simply laborers.

IV

I am writing this paragraph after eight hours of work, loading lumber. I am writing it, as I have written the preceding ones, mainly because I have nothing else particularly interesting or exciting to do. My labor did not weary me, I am full-fed, my room has cheer and comfort, and the devising of phrases is an intriguing sport, though a tame one. So I shall write. But first I must consider my ideas and get them in order. I turn off the light and settle comfortably in my chair.

Through my window I see the mill lights and the glowing domes of the burners, and beyond these the darkness of a great forest that reaches to the snows of

the Cascades. Lofty peaks, hundreds of sections of giant pines, a river roaring down a canyon which cleaves a desert of lava ridges and buttes. To the South there is a hundred miles of cattle range. Surely a grand setting for a roaring, tumultuous life of freedom-loving men, . . .

☛ An idea: I shall go exploring, and on my return write of the men and life I have found. . . .

I descended the stairs and saw two of my fellow-roomers, husky mill-workers, solemnly conversing over a table heaped with magazines and newspapers. I stopped to listen. Perhaps a spree was being planned, or a joust with a crew of loggers. The voices were argumentative.

"What the hell y' see in Fairbanks, anyway? He's a swift guy, all right, but he can't pull half the stuff Tom Mix does. He was a real cowboy, too, that bird was."

"What I'm trying to get at is Fairbanks has the *art*, see? He's there with the real he-actin', too, but he puts *art* in his picshers, an' that way they's somethin' to his actin', see? For what the newspapers say is, the picshers need more *art*. That way they's a real force of progress an'—"

I passed on. Art has enchanted the savage; his soul ripples and gleams under its airs and stars!

I left the boarding-house and turned up the street that led by the mills. After passing the American Legion building I reached Main Street, but ere I struck out for the bon-bon district I paused for respectful consideration of the 4-L Hall. The Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen was a creation of the tyranny of holiness; the good folk used it to oust the I. W. W. from spruce operations during the war. The organization persists now as a petting party between the lumberman and his employes. It is not greatly different from other company unions. A fair fraction of the workers belong to it because they consider it a guardian of the eight-hour day. It provides means to settle disputes between the employer and the workers, guarantees a very minimum wage and

stands staunchly for American Ideals. It opposes rum-drinking, hell-raising and unrestricted immigration, and its members must vow allegiance to the land of milk and honey and, incidentally, declare against strikes. The president of this loyal legion of brawny loggers and hard-headed lumbermen is an ex-professor of English! In this hall the safety and efficiency experts punch out their ideas and the ecstatic sociologists deliver themselves of profundities and appeals. Citadel of the New Freedom! I saluted it gravely and passed on.

I reached the first business block and passed a grocery store, a cobbler's shop, a confectionery, a meat market, a poolroom and confectionery, a temple of art, another confectionery and a clothing store. I turned into the side street and the light of Ye Sweete Shoppe threw its glitter into my eyes. I retreated to the poolroom. I entered, sauntered past the big show-case crammed with candy, and stopped by three men who were drinking pink milkshakes.

As I sipped my near-beer I contemplated the trio. Good men, all three, still representing the best stuff of the nation, because they were still the least pretentious. They had strong frames for hard and perilous living, and eyes—alight with vitality even now—that could be dancing stars in a free and stirring environment. At their labor of felling trees or skidding logs, their faces sweat-streaked and dusty, their rough-clad bodies turning, twisting, lunging, stiffening in shifts of action, they stir admiration. When in the woods I have fancied that the loggers have the blood that beat in the legions of Rome and the sailormen of old England and Spain. In physical energy and vitality they are superior to any class of American labor. But what a transformation when their hours of leisure come and they remember their duties as members in good standing of Our Civilization! For them, too, there are now pure and refined pleasures, docile behavior, modish apparel, consideration of public matters . . . !

My friends were dressed in the latest from Rochester; they were barbered and

bejeweled, and talcum powder whitened their cheeks. The players of cards and pool were quiet; they simply played and smoked and munched candy. The suppressionists had conquered and tamed their race; their spirits were caged, their instincts drugged. Small wonder that the simpletons among them are lured by the childish excitements of the Ku Klux Klan!

We took a few chances on a punch board, and K. C. won a box of candy.

"We got some high-school women dated," said K. C. as we ate the sweets. "We got plenty of room in the car. Come along."

"Got something else on tonight."

"I ain't keen on goin' myself. Them damn goofy kids give me a pain. But what else you got to do 'round this hind end of creation but chase 'em, that's what."

"What else anywhere in the whole damn country?" growled P. L.

Having no intelligent reply, I plucked an answer from the national catechism.

"America's the best country in the world. How'd you like to live in Europe? You got eight-hour jobs, all you can eat, clothes and automobiles. Still you kick!"

"Well, I s'pose that's true enough," P. L. agreed reluctantly, and the others nodded.

"But just the same," declared K. C., "I want to get a kick out of life sometimes, an' I feel all haywire, for I can't somehow. Moonshine ain't worth a damn the way you have to drink it, sneakin' around alleys or lockin' yourself up, an' I 'bout got a bellyfull of gasoline an' women. But they's all they is. I wish I could go hog-wild an' raise hell just once an' do it right. Oh, well; let's have some more pink belly-wash."

V

These men belonged to the tribe whose calked boots once crashed on the floors, and whose bellows once rattled the glasses of the bars on Burnside Street and Yesler Way! In mackinaws, staggered overalls and logger boots they came to town for their

blow-ins, and in this garb they returned to the camps, their rough life brightened by the memory of short but wild and thrilling days of revelry. They toiled fiercely at dangerous labor, and they were violent in every activity. When the uplifters began to burn away the weeds and briars of evil in the West the loggers terrified the missionaries by starting the I. W. W. forest fire. This organization had courage and imagination in its beginnings, but the campus radicals devitalized it. Its pungent by-words were bundled into sober tracts, and the shrewd and wary labor policies of the employers soon left it to the mercy of the intelligentsia—and it began to disintegrate. Now it is an earnest and active ally of the Prohibitionists, and during the strike it called last Summer in Portland and Seattle it played the rôle of stool-pigeon!

Such is the new laborer of the frontier, the heir of the old-time savage. He has many material comforts undreamed of by his predecessor. In the section where I am working our condition is almost Utopian. We have the eight-hour day, respectable wages, insurance, health protection, safety-guards, sheets and showers in the camps, democratic association with our employers. But we also have a large measure of boredom, which, like a wet fog, breeds rust wherever it falls. The new laborer has leisure and nothing to do with it. He reads desperately the chief newspapers and fiction magazines. He has discovered duties and ideas, and they have made him sober and right-minded and a little ridiculous. Consider the spectacle of a paw-handed, anvil-shouldered toiler declaring the faith to a gang of equally Gothic listeners! The new rival of the barber! Behold his hairy paw fumbling among the ribbons and lace of a box of chocolates! Harken to his basso giggles as he rides down the highway with a gang of spooners! The suppression of his old spirit has brought him into a sugar age. The bulge in his pocket is a box of candy instead of a bottle. And the pamphlet he is reading is not the *Police Gazette*, but a work on etiquette!

APOSTLE TO THE HEATHEN

BY ERNEST BOYD

IN THE high and far-off days of splendid isolation he would have been merely incredulous if it had been suggested that America would ever open a lucrative career for his talents. He had then just come down from Oxford and was hardly aware that the North American colonies existed. Fabian Socialism was his creed, more or less, but he was an aristocratic radical and had shunned the plebeian society of such Rhodes scholars as might have too sharply reminded him of the overseas dominions. On his arrival in London he had inevitably been caught up in the orbit of those now dimmed stars, then blazing comets of post-Victorian radicalism, for whom what is now euphemistically known as the British Commonwealth was simply imperialistic propaganda designed to further the tariff schemes of Joseph Chamberlain. Clean-limbed Englishman though he was, the battles which he won on the playing-fields of Eton were not of the kind that give promise of Waterloos. England, he used to say, was good enough for him, and it was his ambition to be accounted one of the gallant band of Liberal warriors of peace who wished to restore that demi-paradise to its once high estate by means of Fabian social reform. With Wells and Shaw as pillars of fire in the night of industrialism he came to London to place his pen, his perfect manners and his classical education at the service, not of the People, for he despised them, but, at the service of a vague monster whom the early Fabians had christened Social Democracy.

To see him on the lecture platform, or

lunching at a women's club, in his morning-coat and well creased trousers of Bond Street elegance, his wing-collar catching the light on its all-British gloss, was a sartorial reminder of changed times. In the early days he affected a brown velvet jacket, the baggiest of trousers and a monstrously gnarled stick. It was in this garb that he adorned the editorial office of a weekly review in which his unsigned editorials on the nationalization of mines and kindred topics were hardly less admired than the poems and sketches which he contributed over his own name to the literary section. The latter were collected and appeared as his first book, in a small edition which he has so successfully suppressed that his American admirers cherish the few copies obtainable at a price exceeding his total monthly income at this period. His wife still has a file of the review containing those anonymous political writings which eventually secured him an important post on a London paper. It was then that he acquired the leisure in which to write the books upon which his claim to fame—and eventually to American royalties—was to rest. At the same time, owing to his position as literary editor and the innumerable ramifications which he gradually established in the English press, he also acquired a network of influence which materially assisted his career as an established author. It became impossible for an unfavorable review of any book of his to appear, because almost every possible reviewer was under obligations to him, or entertained hopes of him, in his editorial capacity. The clippings from the London papers which ac-