

them to Boston, where they could feed pigeons on the Common. They might drive through our own mountain scenery, reading or talking clothes. St. Augustine or the California Missions would serve to be called "musty stone heaps." They could slouch as supinely

and ride with their feet cocked up for immensely greater distances with infinitely less expense.

In the meantime, I would ship abroad the platoons of fine American boys and girls who could take their places and cause to be thrown wide once more the

hospitable doors of the lovers of youth all over England and the Continent—doors that are perceptibly closing against the whooping collegiate tourist on whom, in European eyes, only the feathered headdress is needed for the completing touch.

## A Day in the Cumberlands

MARIAN LACKEY

**A**NOISE at the door of the community house among the foothills of the Cumberlands roused me, and I opened my eyes, noted that it was five o'clock, and called, "Who is there?"

"Are you goin' to lay in that bed all day?" came the sullen answer. Quickly donning dressing gown and slippers, I opened the door. On the porch stood a weary-looking woman, dressed in a faded calico dress and a thin, ragged sweater. Beside her a towheaded boy of about twelve, his skin showing through ragged overalls, shifted nervously from one bare foot to the other; at the bottom of the steps a tall, gaunt man, unshaven and with long, untrimmed hair, was spitting tobacco juice onto the path.

"Is this where the lady lives what gives clothes to school children?" asked the woman.

"We do when we have them," I answered, shivering in the biting morning air. "Won't you come in—I'll have a fire going in a minute." While I started the fire, they sat grimly silent, then as warmth began to seep into the room the woman handed me a note.

"Teacher sont hit," she explained.

The note indeed was from the teacher of one of the remote mountain schools. It told of the boy's desire to attend school, and his parents' inability to buy clothes for him.

"Jim here hain't scarcely missed a day's school this year," the mother said, "but hit's gittin' plumb cold for him to go barefoot, and my man hain't had no work for four months. We did garden some, but the drought plumb burnt up our garden and 'pears like we can't scarcely git enough to eat, much less buy clothes and sech."

While they sat warming by the fire, the woman went on: "We was sorry to

waken you, but we left home way 'fore daylight thinkin' we'd have to walk all of the way. Foot of the mountain we ketched us a ride on a truck and we'd been settin' out there the longest."

I explained my shameful lying in bed until daylight by telling them I had worked until midnight, but still they seemed skeptical. Questions brought out the fact that there were ten children in the family, five of school age, but that none of the other children had been to school because they didn't have clothes that were "fitten." I wondered

if they called those things Jim was wearing "clothes," and went into the store-room to see what I could find. Fortunately, we had received a large box from a church group the day before, and soon we were busy sorting out proper sizes, not only for Jim, but for the other children as well.

"We don't want nothin' give to us," said the mother as we worked. "Teacher said you'd let us do something to earn the things."

"Indeed we will, and when we find what you need, we'll talk about that," I told her.

While I went out to start breakfast, Jim dressed in his new clothing. He grinned sheepishly as he exhibited himself in the good blue suit, clean white shirt and leather jacket, wool socks and stout shoes. The mother was delighted over the warm, pretty coat we had found for her, but the father refused the coat offered him until he could do some work to pay for it. Carefully I listed the clothes, being sure that the price charged was acceptable to them. Then we began to plan ways in which they could earn their clothes.

Knowing the district in which they lived, I was able to make suggestions—Jim could go early to the schoolhouse and have the fire started when the teacher arrived; his little sister could go along to sweep out the schoolroom; the father could build a footbridge over the creek (sometimes when the creek was high, after a storm, the children could not cross without getting wet); and the mother could go to the home of an invalid, whose husband could not give her the care she needed, and see what she could do to make her more comfortable. This satisfied them.

As I went with them to the door, a



young man got off a sorry-looking mule and entered the gate. He was a round-faced, blue-eyed youth who didn't look over eighteen (I later learned he was twenty). He would not sit down, and remained just inside the door, twisting his cap in his hands as he told me haltingly and with much embarrassment of his wife's illness.

Realizing the mountain man's horror of discussing feminine ailments with a woman, I asked as few questions as possible, but learned that since their baby had been born four months before, his wife had been getting weaker and weaker. "Just wastin' away, she is," he told me tearfully. "A feller told me you helped his wife, and I hoped you'd come to see mine. I can't leave her to go to work 'cause there's three babies to tend, besides lookin' after her, so I hain't got no money and the doctor won't go."

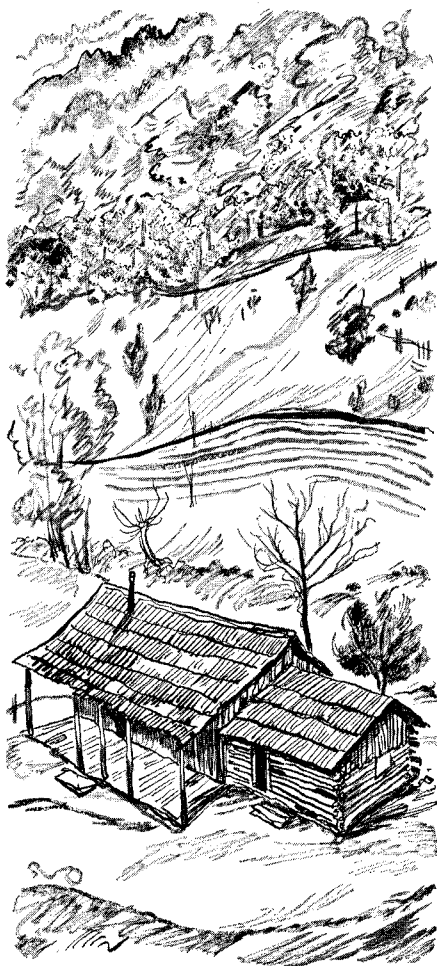
I promised to go as soon as I could dress and eat breakfast, and he finally consented to sit down. But before I had left the room, a woman who lived on the next street rushed up the steps with a baby in her arms calling, "Miz Lackey, quick, my baby's awful bad."

I flung open the door and took the rigid little body from her. One look at the blue face and rolling eyes, and I was on the way to the bathroom, blessing the chance that had made me have a fire in the stove and water hot. Clothes and all, I laid the child into a hot bath, and soon the little body relaxed, the blue eyes opened, and the child (one of my favorites in the baby clinic) smiled at me. Wrapping her in a huge towel, I carried her back to the fire, and the mother followed, weeping.

"What in the world did you give her to eat?" I asked, going to the phone to call the doctor.

"Nothin' much," the mother sniffed. "I didn't have no milk and I couldn't fix what you told me, so I give her just a little hot biscuit and gravy, but she kep' a-whintlin' so I give her a pork rind to suck on."

The doctor arrived in a few minutes, and while he examined the child, I slipped away, dressed, and hastily drank a cup of coffee. By the time he had given the mother directions for the child's care, I was back in the office, telling him about the wife of the man who was waiting. The doctor had other urgent calls which made it impossible for him to go out there, but he said if I found conditions as bad as reported



he would go later. Sending the man out to feed my horse, I found dry clothing for the sick baby. The doctor had agreed to take the mother and baby home as he started on his calls.

When my horse had finished eating, I saddled him, and as we rode, the man told me his story:

Three years before, when he and his wife had been married only a few weeks, they had moved to a distant part of the county, had built a nice, three-room cabin, cleared some land, raised some good crops, and "was beginnin' to git a fine start." With the first year's profits they had bought some cattle and sheep, his father had given them a good horse, his wife had put up great quantities of fruit, their first child had been born and was thriving, the second was on the way when, one morning, he went off to town for flour and coffee. The wife was getting ready to go to the spring to wash and had put on her oldest dress. Barefooted she stepped outside the door with the child in her arms just as two masked men rode up, pointed guns at her, and said, "We'll give you just two minutes to git out of sight—start a-runnin'." Then as she started off ter-

rified, they called after her, "Tell that man o' yours he ain't the only one in this county wants to git along good."

As she ran into the woods, they fired some shots to frighten her. She ran for some way, then climbed the mountain, hid, and watched them burn her home and shoot the sheep and cattle. They turned their horses into the garden and rode back and forth, trampling the crop into the earth. Then they tore down the cornfield fence so that wandering cattle from near-by farms could complete the destruction. With this, they rode off.

When they had gone, she set off over the mountain trail to meet her husband and turn him back. She feared that if he returned he would be killed. She met him halfway to town, and together they had walked the long weary miles, heart-broken and frightened, to his father's house. They knew well the reason for the attack—a great deal of cattle had been stolen in the county, and one day, walking through the wood, he had come upon two men skinning a newly killed beef; frightened, he had tried to slip away without being seen, but one of the men had recognized him. The next day the men had been arrested and although he swore he knew nothing of it, they blamed him for "turning them up to the law." It had been "way in the night" when he and his wife finally reached his father's house. A few days later they moved into the house they now occupy.

"Hit's purty pore," he said of the house, "but I hain't never got a start no more. Last summer the drought was so bad all our crops burnt up, and this year my wife's been so sick I couldn't leave her to git no work at all."

We had been riding up a steep mountain trail. Now, far below us in the valley, we saw a tiny, tumble-down log cabin, roofed with homemade shingles known hereabouts as "shakes." Single file, we rode down a mountain path so steep and rocky our mounts stumbled and slipped. The country was glorious in its wild beauty, but an air of desolation seemed to hang about the cabin. Two tiny boys ran behind the house as we rode up. "They don't want you should see them 'cause they ain't got no pants," the father explained.

There was only one small window, high up in the cabin wall. At first I scarcely could see the sick woman who lay under a great pile of homemade

quilts on a rickety bed. The interior of the cabin was like hundreds I had visited through the mountains. Two beds, a couple of split-bottom chairs, and a small iron stove, ashes spilling from a crack in the side, completed the furnishings. The loft was unfloored, the building paper had been nailed to the rafters; when the wind blew, particles of soot came through cracks in the paper and settled on the contents of the room. Through a sagging doorway, I caught a glimpse of the kitchen, a lean-to affair of rough boards. In it were a stove (a block of wood substituting for a missing leg), a rough board table, a few cracked dishes, a frying pan, and a tea kettle. As my eyes became accustomed to the dimness, I saw that the woman was gaunt to the point of emaciation; brilliant spots of color, which at first I mistook for rouge, burned high on her cheekbones; her lips were blue. A fat baby wailed lustily in the bed behind her. When I picked him up to change his diaper, I discovered that his buttocks were raw and bleeding.

"Pears like wherever his passages touch him hit takes the skin off," the mother whispered weakly.

At my request the father brought warm water and soap—I had intended to bathe the baby, but when I saw the soap much was explained—it was home-made laundry soap, so strong that it would take the skin off the hands of a grown person! I temporarily abandoned the bath idea and examined the mother. I am not a nurse, but it would have been evident even to a less trained eye than mine that the woman's condition was grave. After telling the man I'd return as soon as possible and to have water hot, I rode back to town.

We had taken a short cut over the mountains, but there was a fairly passable automobile road which went within a quarter of a mile of the sick woman's home, so after a hasty breakfast-luncheon I phoned the doctor, who promised to come out later, gathered such clothing as was needed for the children and mother, packed a kit of soap, towels, and other toilet articles for the baby, and returned to the place in my car. The next hour or two I spent bathing mother and children, dressing the little boys, at first shy and later delighted, in clean overalls and warm sweaters, cleaning up the cabin, and finally in giving the father some lessons in cooking. The only things he knew

## MOUNTAIN PEOPLE

*Tim Lawthorne*

I tunnel mountains through the dark midnight  
And use the crowbar with a calloused hand.  
My eyes have grown afraid of silver light  
That is the pretty sunlight, kissing land;  
I love this light of day that hurts my eyes  
When I cart slate for dumping on the hill  
And stand on tippie where the warm wind sighs,  
And where the open world is not so still,  
Where sounds of beetles and the building wrens  
Are music in the sassafras and grass.  
The thick walls muffle sounds to mining men,  
The sounds of birds and bees in wind-blue glass.  
I know not night nor day in this dark hole;  
I know the powder, pick, the fork and bar,  
The touch of earth, a helpless-handed mole;  
My eyes know not the beauty of a star.

*Munford Sowards*

In mines my day is night, my night is day,  
My brother is the handle of the fork;  
Around my fingernails the blue-mud clay;  
The rats my signal when roof dangers lurk.  
I've blasted coal lumps from the hills' black guts  
And carted them out in a world moon-misted;  
Stood in the sulphured water draining ruts,  
Down on my side and drilled with body twisted.  
I've lived the rat back in this nether world  
And gutted bowels of earth until the morning;  
In soggy clothes went home through white drifts hurled  
In fluffy sheets, desolate and forlorning.  
Coal in the mines is never good clean breath;  
Coal in the mines is never good clean bread;  
Coal in the mines, my friends, is nearer death;  
Coal in the mines, bread, breath and one long-dead.

