

THE LEGEND OF PAUL BUNYAN

"Most Amiable Giant That Man Ever Imagined"

A CORRESPONDENT wrote some months ago asking us who Paul Bunyan was. At the time we didn't know, nor could we find him in any book of reference. We did, however, get a little information about him from the American Legation. Now we have the full story from a recent issue of "Fortune."

FOR two years *Fortune* has been picturing in portrait and text the deeds of American heroes. Their record has been awe-inspiring. They have been alike in one profound respect. No hero in the folklore of the country accomplished in imagination what they accomplished in fact.

Only one fictional character is entitled to stand among them; Paul Bunyan, who ruled America in the happy years between the Winter of the Blue Snow and the Spring That the Rain Came Up From China. He was a quiet man, methodical and hard-working, who brushed his beard with a pine tree and could do anything he set his mind to except make his loggers get up early in the morning. Paul Bunyan is a genuine American folk character, created by the people themselves. He is one of the few characters, among the mythical heroes of the earth, whose stories do not spring from the grey depths of antiquity. The great folk heroes of Europe and Asia were born before history. They lived in the dim universal wonderland of the earth's beginning, breathing fire and changing their shapes, slaying their dragons and conquering their wizards in the days before learning and facts

and statistics placed their gentle curbs on man's imagination.

But Paul Bunyan was born when almost everyone could read and write. He was created in a bunkhouse, in an ordinary logging camp. His deeds were made up by grown men. They sat around the stove, after working all day in the woods — woods that were just as dangerous, with their toppling trunks and falling widow-makers, as the Black Forests whence came European fairy tales — and told stories of spontaneous exaggeration and an odd combination of practical work and extravagant fantasy. It was the loggers, by reputation the most violent roughnecks of all industry, who made up the innocent legend of Paul Bunyan, a lumberman the size of a Douglas fir. They peopled his world with a blue ox, which measured 42 axe-handles plus a plug of Star chewing tobacco between the eyes, with sidehill gougers (short legs on one side so they could walk level on the mountain slopes), with the dingmaul and the filmalooloo bird, the cougarfish and any other animal their imaginations could invent. His land was blessed with lemonade springs, whisky trees, cigarette grass, meadows of purple clover and moose moss. He had pancakes mixed in concrete-mixers, four-horse teams to haul the salt and pepper through a dining hall so vast it took 47 minutes for flunkies on roller skates to skate from end to end. And he had the country of the Wet Desert, Redbottom Lake, Onion River, Blister Valley, not to mention the country of Smiling River with its years of two winters and its winds that blew so hard the logs were sucked up the chimney unless carefully bolted down.



"A quiet man, methodical and hard-working, who brushed his beard with a pine tree." The two pictures on this page are from paintings by the American muralist, William Gropper.

talked Gaelic in his sleep, and Hels Helsen, the Big Swede, the Bull of the Woods, whose battle with Paul smashed down all the trees in what is known to-day as the Dakota Disaster. They made him a useful hero. Paul Bunyan did not go on crusades or wars. He did not rescue princesses or take vows, fulfil penances, or get cheated of his kingdom by a wicked brother. He just worked. He cleared land, straightened crooked rivers by hitching his great blue ox Babe to one end, and laboured sensibly at fantastic jobs. When he came to cut down the fine, closely grained white pine on the Upside Down Mountain his conduct was as extraordinary as the mountain, with its peak in the earth, its slopes five miles in the air, and its trees growing down. With a shotgun whose barrels were as large as sawmill smokestacks he blew the forest from the mountain and on to the plain beneath.

How He Was Revived

There are two Paul Bunyan stories. One is the mass of legends themselves. The other is how they came to be revived. At a time when Dreiser was imagining his bitter capitalists, and Upton Sinclair was creating his troubled exploiters of the poor, when U.S. intellectuals were muckraking the robber barons, Jim Stevens, now of the West Coast Lumbermen's Association, heard accounts of Paul Bunyan from Michael Quinn, lumberyard superintendent in Hoquiam, Washington, who had heard them from Len Day, a Minnesota lumberman, who ran across them in Canada in the 1840's. Stevens wrote, for H. L. Mencken's *American Mercury*, Paul Bunyan's "Black Duck Dinner," with its feasting loggers making as much noise as 70 threshing machines, and the duck bones rattling like the limbs of falling trees. About the same time, Lee J. Smits, for years outdoor editor of the *Detroit Times*, visited Seattle "on a tour of newspaper hoboing." There he wrote for the *Seattle Star* a front-page feature story, "Paul Bunyan, the Epic Lumberjack," and called for readers' contributions of stories they had heard. A year later Ben Hur Lampman in the *Portland Oregonian* launched a similar series that ran for almost two months. Paul Bunyan had stepped out of the bunkhouses and the memories of old loggers and into the schoolrooms and



Paul Bunyan and his huge blue ox. It measured, between the eyes, 42 axe-handles, plus a plug of Star chewing tobacco.

A Useful Hero

The loggers dreamed up the most amiable giant that man ever imagined. They put Paul Bunyan in an odd environment, half an ordinary hard-working logging camp, half a burlesque of national park travel-folders. They gave him companions: Johnny Inkslinger, his book-keeper, Chris Cross-haulsen, Lars Larsen, Murph Murcheson, who

(continued on next page)