

# Belles lettres and bell ringers

## The Third «Folk-Say»

*Folk-Say, A Regional Miscellany: 1931.* Edited by B. A. Botkin. Norman, University of Oklahoma Press. 1931. \$3.00.

THE first issue of *Folk-Say*, in 1929, was a rather thin book, with a scholarly and important introductory article by Dr Botkin. The second issue, in 1930, an imposing, beautiful, large volume, was endowed with several discussions on folklore, folk-say, regionalism, provincialism, etc., in addition to purely literary reading matter. This, the third issue, has stories, sketches, poems, dialogs, but no theoretical discussion. The subtitle of the volume—A Regional Miscellany—explains the choice of the material.

It is good to have representative scenes of different regions assembled in one volume. It is good to have an annual devoted to literary expression of the various psychologies, social standards, customs, dialects, and imaginative creations. Whether it be termed regionalism or provincialism, folklore or folk-say, literature pure and simple or literary treatment of folk material—what matters?

Is "folk" necessarily composed of peasants? We find in this volume a charming little love-story (Cliff Frank's "Court-ing") of a lawyer and a teacher. Are they "folk"? They are simple, unsophisticated people, close to the soil, living a simple life, and using the unpolished dialect of the region.

The contents of the 1931 volume of *Folk-Say* is uncrystallized folklore material. These elements of folklore will never become crystallized as of old, by way of oral repetition and gradual improvement from generation to generation. Due to the tempo of present-day life, to means of communication, to the printed word and the radio, in our times these elements of folklore are fleeting particles, some to merge with others, of a different region, some to undergo rapid adjustment to new conditions, some to die off. It is Dr Botkin's merit that he found a medium for their preservation.

It might seem strange that there should still be localisms in speech, thought, and custom, when "Ish-ka-bibble," "apple sauce," and Broadway hits may and do spread over the country almost instantly, and when the most thick-headed, uneducated day-laborer is not altogether illiterate and has heard about Einstein and the

League of Nations. And yet, this volume is the evidence. Here are assembled witch tales and superstitions of the Ozarks, Mississippi, Louisiana and South Carolina,—some, as in "Ole Miss," pervaded by a deep religious fervor; the dialects of a number of localities; customs and food habits of the different stages in the development of the frontiers; here are depicted types of hoboes and small-town capitalist exploiters; of backwood farmers and boomtown bullies.

Perhaps, democracy on one hand, and increased means of communication on the other, though acting as levelling factors in many ways, yet contain some elements which are responsible for this regionalism—for both phases of it: the persistence of regional differences, and the present literary movement to record and to study them. Democracy obliterates to some extent social distinction and gives—or pretends to give—a dignity to "just common folks," to their speech, their manners, their tastes: "nothing to be ashamed of—were all that'a-way."

Means of communication lead to the knowledge that everywhere there are local peculiarities, and we may just as well keep ours—local loyalties are awakened. It seems therefore that the elements of folk-lore, the "regional folk-material," the picturesqueness and quaintness of local peculiarities are here to stay, although each particular trait will probably be very short-lived. Because of that, because these traits have this fleeting quality, an annual devoted to their literary expression is very valuable; and because they are likely to remain as a whole, in a more or less rapid succession of particular features, the annual ought to have a long and interesting career.

There is more in this volume than samples of local mannerisms. There are examples of different philosophies of life due to regional differences.

Happy Riley, the hero of Pat Morrisette's somewhat repetitious, but inspiring poem, is the product of hardships, longings, aspirations of the settlers of the Northwest, and also of their emotional ecstasies resulting from their communion with nature in the self-abandon of a fisherman, a woodsman, or a hunter.

The wooded Northwest, rich in animal life, agricultural possibilities, fisheries and promising ranches, might well present hardships to pioneers and settlers, but it also rewards for perseverance and for strenuous labor. The asceticism resulting from necessity of facing occasional semi-starvation is therefore not of the gloomy,

morose, pessimistic kind; hope is ever present and ever growing, kindness springs spontaneously from quiet moods of contemplation, and exaltation may lead to a "Riley concept" of a "beatific state."

Not so in the bleak, barren canyons of New Mexico, where the Penitentes have preserved for three hundred years their conception of earthly life as a period of expiation and martyrdom. Their asceticism is gloomy and cruel, they consider joy and comfort a sin. Philip Stevenson in "At the Crossroads" tells a vivid and crushing tale of self-torture, with the final morbid glory of being chosen Cristo for the Easter ceremonies, actually being hung on the cross to gain access to heaven after death.

The Kentucky mountaineers, too, wrestle their bare necessities from Nature with mighty efforts (see "Raccoon John" by Harlan Hatcher). But, though there may be "a mid-April snap" in the air, it does not lash you like the Easter gale and blizzard of the New Mexico canyons. Life is hard, but there is no need to castigate your flesh, for physical pain and bodily torture do not seem an integral, unalienable part of the general system. The problem of salvation, of access to heaven in the next world is still very grave, but in the meanwhile pies and apples and a little laughter are not to be scorned.

"Do you want to escape damnation and escape it forever? Then all you've got to do is come up here and confess your faith in Jesus," according to Brother Baker, though Raccoon John, a Campbellite preacher, maintains that you must be saved by act of faith not once, but many times—"to hold on."

At the summer meeting, where these things are discussed, "there were always a great many preachers. God had fallen into the habit of appearing in a burning bush or something before his servants as they toiled on an unproductive hillside, and sending them forth to spread the gospel." The tedious, strenuous work in the field and garden is left to women and children, and the inspired man of God comes home in the autumn, to share with his family the meager crop through the winter months; and "next year there would be another mouth to feed."

In an East Texas sawmill town social and economic life is on a higher level. There is a higher standard of living and human relations are more complex. Sorrows, hardships and drudgery are plentiful and difficult to endure, so that pent-up emotions break out in religious hysteria, in confessions; but the preacher's main concern is social stability, maintaining the prestige and power of the mill-owner, and discrediting the I. W. W. agitator. Humility and resignation are still preached, but there is no glorification of voluntary suffering, of mortification of the flesh.

Clarence Thornton, the preacher in "Sawmill Divertissements" (by E. M. Berry), is far from seeking martyrdom. The complexities of social organization

and differentiation have brought in their wake self-seeking, hypocrisy, and demagoguery. The contempt for this vale of tears, the horror of earthly joys, the other-worldly aspirations are gone; optimism is replacing pessimism.

Daniel M. Garrison in his excellent "Oilfield Idyls" shows us the next step. Not only is there no need to mortify your flesh, but you must seek sinful joys to "get rid of them wild seeds." Hardships here do not lead to religious fervor, but to reckless wallowing in the most unsavory "pleasures," upheld by hypocritical quibbling.

The contributions are of more or less uniform literary quality—all make very interesting and worthwhile reading. There is a variety of moods and treatments—sinister tragedy, thrilling adventure, sincere pathos, hilarious laughter, light humor, and now and then even a touch of vulgarity. Some of the less successful stories are only raw jokes or trivial anecdotes. Others give the impression of being source material rather than finished products. Whether the book loses or gains thereby is a matter of opinion.

Of the poems Anne McClure's group entitled "County Seat" appeals to me most. In each little gem a whole human drama is compressed, yet the conciseness does not make them less vivid or less effective; on the contrary, the reserve is maintained with such skill that it enhances the appeal to our imagination and leaves unforgettable impressions.

The pleasing appearance and beautiful print of the book are a credit to the publishers.

SOPHIE R. A. COURT.



### The Simpson formations

Charles E. Decker and Clifford A. Merritt. *The Stratigraphy and Physical Characteristics of the Simpson Group*. Norman, Oklahoma Geological Survey, 1931. Price \$1.10.

This paper on the Simpson has for its purpose "to show the distribution of its outcrop, describe its topography, drainage and structure; raise it to the position of a group; divide it into five formations in consonance with the faunal succession and the sedimentary cycles, note their distribution and more important physical changes, horizontally and vertically; note the physical and chemical characteristics of the rocks; list and illustrate a few of its characteristic megascopic and microscopic fossils; show some photo-micrographs of rock textures; give the age and correlation of the formations; give the result of the study of a number of detailed sections, and reproduce in a graphic table a number of these sections; note the unconformities and hiatuses below, within, and above the Simpson; and indicate the general direction from which

the terrigenous materials were received, hoping thus in as brief compass as possible to show the more salient features of the Simpson in its outcrops."

The Simpson is subdivided into five different formations which named from the bottom upward are Joins, Oil Creek, McLish, Tulip Creek and Bromide. Each subdivision is adequately mapped, has detailed sections described with considerable care in the geologic time scale. All of these features are of immense practical value in clearing up many of the problems of correlation that have been encountered in subsurface studies in other parts of the Mid-Continent area. The ten very excellent tables of detailed sections give a wealth of information regarding character of the sediments, mineralogical content, fossil content and thickness that will be useful for purposes of comparison.

The Description of Ostracodes and Conodonts, by Reginald W. Harris, describes fifteen forms. Each form is placed carefully in the section and the collecting ground described. Part of these figures are from drawings and part from photographs.

The section on Mineralogical Character by Clifford A. Merritt arrives at no definite results but the description of his laboratory method in the determination of dolomite is enlightening. He also describes a process for determining insoluble residues and at the end describes a series of thin sections.

This book is of importance to specialists and to geologists of the Mid-Continent field. It has an excellent map of the Simpson outcrop in the Arbuckle mountains and the Criner hills, with six cross sections. The bibliography is incomplete and the book needs an index.

CASWELL PROCTOR, '21 geol.



### Regional poetry

B. A. BOTKIN. *The Southwest Scene*. An Anthology of Regional Verse. Oklahoma City, The Economy Co., 1931. \$1.

B. A. Botkin is one of those rare individuals who combines the rôles of poet and critic, prophet and realist. A discriminating critic with balanced, catholic judgment, he has carved also for himself an enviable niche among the poets of the southwest. A dreamer, too, he visualized some years ago a renaissance of the literature of the people themselves. For some time this project remained visionary. Then, with the advent of the University of Oklahoma Press, the opportunity came to translate the vision to paper. The result was *Folk-Say*, A Regional Miscellany, 1929. It was a declaration of independence, of a sort, from the tailor-made literature of the east. It proclaimed through Doc-

tor Botkin's introduction to that volume (now out of print) the vitality of regional culture. Regionalism, of which Doctor Botkin is now the leading American exponent, is a national movement designed to give expression to the real literature of the people in the various regions of America. The vitality of the regional movement attests the value of Botkin, the prophet; the new wealth it is bringing America attests the soundness of Botkin, the realist. The new regionalism has as its spiritual capital the University of Oklahoma, thanks to a poet with a vision and courage.

Regionalism is expressed through literature, sociology, folk lore, folk-say, tradition, etc. The physical scene of any region assumes importance as it influences the character of the people of that region. It is the scene in our southwest which Doctor Botkin has explored in this attractive anthology. By grouping of poems and by explanation he has sought to demonstrate the values of the southwest scene. The southwest, its moods, its expressions, its landscape, are viewed through John McClure, Kenneth Kaufman, Paul Eldridge, John Gould Fletcher, Muna Lee, Maurice Kelley, Haniel Long, May Frank and others. From the wistful opening by Mr McClure ("In Bourbon Street") to the l'envoie ("El Rito de Santa Fe") the southwest scene comes to us through the sections: Landscapes with Figures; Footprints; "Civilization" and Earth-Contact.

The number of university alumni represented in the anthology is significant of the large leadership Oklahomans have taken in the regional movement. It is significant, also, of the progress of regionalism that this should be a book designed primarily for use in schools.—J. A. B.



From *The Epic of America* by James Truslow Adams (Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1931. \$3.)

"America is yet 'The Land of Contrasts,' as it was called in one of the best books written about us, years ago. One day a man from Oklahoma depresses us by yawping about it in such a way as to give the impression that there is nothing in that young State but oil wells and millionaires, and the next day one gets from the University there its excellent quarterly critical list of all the most recent books published in France, Spain, Germany, and Italy, with every indication of the beginning of an active intellectual life and an intelligent play of thought over the ideas of the other side of the world."



Dr Charles M. Perry, head of the department of philosophy, has presented the university with a collection of manuscripts dealing with the St. Louis movement in philosophy. This material was incorporated in a University of Oklahoma Study, *The St. Louis Movement in Philosophy*. (University of Oklahoma Press, \$1.50).