

THE LAST MEDICINE SHOW



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Leo Kahdot and Arthur Jackson might not draw large crowds with their real names. As Chief Thundercloud and Peg Leg Sam they were well-known throughout the South where they drew crowds to the last of the medicine shows

Leo Kahdot is a full-blooded Potawatomi Indian, born and raised in Oklahoma, living now on his farm south-east of Oklahoma City. As a boy, he soon became attracted to a musical life and was playing piano and trumpet by the time he was 15. This was during the years after the turn of the century, for, as Sam says, the Chief's been 73 ever since he can remember; an overstatement, but he is well into his 70s. He remembers seeing John Philip Sousa's band come into Oklahoma City and was struck by the ability of the trumpet player. ¹ "I thought that was the greatest thing I ever heard in my life . . . had more influence on me than almost anything". He moved into vaudeville and was playing piano and trumpet in Kansas City at the Seward (?) Theatre by the time he was 18-19. He played with the Band of All Nations, playing trumpet in this band of international and multi-racial musicians, barnstormed through Illinois, worked with Polish dancers and was a member of the Four Americans, all Indian boys who sang and played. He travelled as far as New England and Canada, when a sick friend asked him to help out with a medicine show, then travelling in Texas. Although he protested at first that he was too busy, he finally went -- and stayed with such shows ever since! Sometimes he ran a show as large as 15-20 pieces. He'd have a band of 6-7, 3-4 head comedians, 2 straight men, 2 dancers and 2 blues singers. Comedians like Barker Jones and Lightning Johnson, blues singers like Baby Helen and musician/comics like Pink Anderson and Peg Leg Sam. Pink ran with the Chief briefly in the 1940s and the Chief tried unsuccessfully to persuade Pink to join him in the late 1950s, when Pink had retired from medicine shows. Pink had taught Sam and it was Sam who joined the Chief on a permanent basis in the late 1950s, though he had worked off and on with him since he first met him in Smithfield, N. C. in 1937, when Sam was with Emmett Smith.

The Chief had always been attracted by the circus bands and, as a boy, would go to listen to them whenever they came through. He was even once asked to join one but he was still at school at the time. His medicine-shows worked out of South Georgia, swinging north into Tennessee, to return for the winter to south Georgia about the first week in October. He then went back to his farm, coming back in the spring, ready to head off and open up about the first day in April. He had a small but steady troupe with little turnover.

He was about to have a bigger show in 1960 but his partner died. He had just bought the circus-top, canvas and a truck from the closing Robinson Brothers show. The Chief had gone out and booked the opening night in Georgia, when his partner died a week before they were due to open. Unable to find a replacement, the Chief finally sold up and paid off his performers. On top of this, there were spiralling costs. Licences to perform became very expensive, on top of which came costs of electricity and water and rising wages. Then, "people don't go out for entertainment like they used to years ago"; sad but true.

Arthur Jackson is known as Peg Leg Sam or Peg Leg Pete around his home town, and much further afield. Born in December 1911 near Jonesville, South Carolina, he soon began to take up playing harmonica from such local musicians as Butler Jennings and Biggar Mapps, and later from a fine harmonica-player from Atlanta, Elmon 'Keg-Shorty' Bell. Sam has travelled over most of the United States both as hobo and medicine-show performer. He learned most of his trade from Pink Anderson, whom he recalls first meeting about 1922, when Pink was performing one night with Dr. Kerr's show in Jonesville. Pink had learned much of his material from Blind Simmie Dooley, who was from Hartwell, Georgia. When Pink first met Simmie, in 1916, the latter was being led by another singer from Simmie's home town. Pink took over the role of 'lead' when Henry left Simmie in 1918, and it was in this year that Pink began to travel with Kerr and earned his first pay on a show. As Sam willingly states: "Pink put me up . . . he learned me how to cross-fire with him". Sam acted as straight man, 'feeding' Pink the lines but later became a comic in his own right. Cross-firing? Here are some examples taken from Sam in 1973 but also recorded from Pink Anderson together with Sam in 1970:

'How many sides a house got to it?' I said, '4 sides'. 'You done 4-sided up a lie,' Pink tole me, 'a house got 8 sides'. 'Can you name them?' Pink said, 'Yes. North side, east side, west side, south side, topside, bottomside, inside and outside.'

Then Pink asked me one time, 'Where was money first invented at?' I told him, 'Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.' 'He said, 'You done Pennsylvaniaed up a lie. It was originated at in Noah's arc.' I said, 'How in the world? Noah didn't know anything about money. Prove it!' He said, 'I know exactly how much was in Noah's arc.' I said, 'How much?' He said, '\$3.51.' I said, 'Prove it to me.' He said, 'Didn't a frog go into Noah's arc?' I said, 'Yeh.' 'Didn't he have a green back? One dollar right there! Didn't a duck go in Noah's arc?' I said, 'Yeh.' He said 'Didn't he have a bill? 2 dollars right there! Didn't a teeny little duck go in Noah's arc?' I said, 'Yeh.' He said, 'There's half a bill right there! Didn't a lamb go in Noah's arc?' I said, 'Yeh, but what's a lamb got to do with money, Pink?' He said, 'Didn't he have 4 quarters? There's another dollar right there. That's \$3.50'. Then he stopped for a while and I said, 'You told me there was \$3.51 in Noah's arc. Where's the other cent?' He said, 'Didn't a goat go in Noah's arc?' I said, 'Yeh.' 'Didn't he have a cent? Three dollars and fifty-one cents!'

Sam worked with many shows.

I worked with a heap of them. I worked with this'n, what they call Thundercloud. Worked with another, Jeffries, they call him Thundercloud. Worked with Smiley a long time, worked with another fellow called Emmett Smith, whose home is up north. That was the one I went down to Mississippi with and my brother had to send me money so I could get back . . . I used to work out of Nashville with Dr. Thompson's Jig (?Jake) Show; that was all out through Memphis, Indiana. I was head comedian on that. He never did pay off though. He died -- I was glad of it. He wasn't going to pay me nohow. Old Jeffries -- he didn't pay me and he died. Look like every one who didn't pay me died off! I tell you who was good. The Chief's a good paymaster; what he promises, you'll get it. Smiley -- name was Frank Kerr. White feller, you know. Work that day, he'd pay me. Work that night, and he'd pay me again, same as after I'd worked the day. Them two the best paymasters I ever worked with. Old Jeffries wouldn't pay Jesus Christ! I quit him and I come back into Raleigh [North Carolina] one time. He pulled out a roll of money that big. 'You better come back 'n work for me'. I said, 'For what, you never paid me before!' He thought he could dupe me, you know, with a roll of money. Oh, the half ain't never been told . . . I showed with Silas Green a long time; head comedian on there I was. That's where Peg Bates² started off, with Silas Green, you know. We were there together. I saw him cut one of my steps, 2-3 years ago on T.V. I had that dance as good as him but he was the first man come out; wasn't no good after he'd come out. I used to have that step I called the 'Honey Child'. I could cut it too. I'd say, 'Mama, don't let your mouth run juice cos I'm already married!'

I travelled all round through Ohio, all down in Missouri, up in Minnesota. I never did go no farther thisaway than Baltimore [with a show]. I went the other way around -- all out west. Come on down to New Mexico, Colorado. All down Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and all that. Back up through Kansas, that way. I stayed around Rocky Mount North Carolina a long time. I stayed out there about 4 months of the year for 25 years. Fenner's warehouse -- Mr. Julius Fenner. I could go right there again any time I get ready. He'd get worried about me. Sometimes I'd stay off 2-3 years. That old man, he died. Last thing he heard was me playing Fox Chase. He loved for me to play that.

Sam worked in Rocky Mount for Fenner's warehouse, broadcasting over local radio and occasionally for T.V. into the early 1960s. It was while he was here that he ran across Blind Boy Fuller in Durham and saw another harmonica player play two harmonicas at the same time, and used his trick. While he was in Durham, Brownie McGhee, recently in town from Tennessee, saw Sam playing round the tobacco warehouses,³ just as he did in Rocky Mount, another regional tobacco marketing centre. Sam's tales about his playing in various towns are legion, from hilarious sketches about supposed times in Baltimore when he was masquerading as a preacher, to humorous comments about his peg leg.

I never will forget one time when I was in Cincinnati, showing there on John Street; Central and John. Went to step off that stage, way up in the air, long as this room, and I got up there and danced and got ready to step off and fell off, right down on the ground. Broke my peg--sheared it right off there! Knocked a babe out of a woman's arms, laying there on the ground looking up. People there laughed. I was lucky too. Went right up the road. Man had a little workshop--made me another side for just \$2. Charged me \$4 but cut it down. Went right back on with the show.

The numbers of performers on the shows would vary, but usually ran from 8-10. Pink recalls that the shows usually had 5-6 people, with musicians, comics and dancers, like the old minstrel shows. Of Chief Thundercloud, he said that the Chief was now only "a pitchman, but he have had a show". This was a large one in Tennessee but Pink and Sam stayed in North Carolina. Kerr never had more than three; Sam, Pink and Rubboard, also known as Chilly Winds. He was washboard player Charlie Williams, well remembered in the area. He was originally from Augusta, Georgia and died about 1956. As well as play on medicine shows, Sam spent some time in the Caribbean.

You know, I cooked from Key West to Havana, Cuba for three years! Short order -- that's the reason your mouth smack in there a while ago. [We had just eaten, and well!] I slipped on the boat. They didn't know I was on there until we was way out and then they found me. They talked about throwing me overboard, you know. I told the man I'd work for him. I worked about a week and he paid me that week and kept me all the time then. I go backwards and forwards on the boat all the time -- Havana and Jamaica. Lot of your [English] people down there! I wasn't playing much then, a little bit. Lost John and train pieces, you know. Worked three years there and got tired. Quit that. A drifter. Moved on. A rollin' stone ...

If Sam travelled everywhere with the medicine shows, he also travelled a great deal before he started earning his living in this manner. As a boy he had run away from home to Columbia and Charleston. As a young man he spent much of his time riding trains from one town to another. An inveterate hobo, Sam knew all about the subtleties of 'riding the blinds'.

I nearly got killed a thousand times. Hanging on by one finger. Caught it wrong, you know. Freight train going thisaway... never catch the first, catch the last. Catch the first and it'll woop you up against the car. Catch the last and it'll pull you in after it... I rode some trains. I rode every one. All out west. Like starved to death on the Southern Pacific, out of New Orleans. The Sunset Limited... but I didn't ride the Sunset, rode one of the freight trains. They didn't stop to get no water, they pick up water on the fly. Run faster than a passenger train could. Three days across there; no water and that sandy desert. Know how I got water? Seen a hose leaking, dripping water and I sucked that. Lived outdoors half my life... 25-30 years when it wasn't too cold. I'd go up in Maine in the summertime. Cool, cool all the time. I'd ride passenger trains after I got to Washington, D. C. Never rode freight trains much above there. I came down from Detroit one time, from Buffalo, Lake Erie... I acted the fool. It was warm up front when it started and I got up there, catch a little sun. They had to pick me off when I got to Buffalo... froze to death. Meet the wind and no heat at all. Along about September, October. All my finger-nails jumped off and my two ear-pips busted-open. I like to got killed again, coming down on the C & O from Cincinnati, coming into Big Bend Tunnel. I caught the freight train right there, down below Hinton, West Virginia, and I was riding down through Richmond, Virginia. Heap o' tunnels there. Got up on a water-tank, and under a tunnel she went with me. And that smoke came right down on me. If I'd had one more minute I'd have died. You ought to have seen me just scrambling for breath...

Lord, I done a heap o' tricks. First time I crossed the Hudson river, 1924⁴-- Jersey City. Worked about 2 hours and made good money, cos times was tough then. I stayed there three days. I was working on the street and people upstairs threw a dishpan of water on my head! I was greasy as a pig! So I crossed back over and caught me a freight-train. Plainfield. Then I went east to Allentown, Pennsylvania. Stayed up there a coupla years. Times was tough then, man. I was a bumner; it was easy. People give me something to eat, you know. I had a good time. When I first went up Mooretown, that's 18 miles above Allentown, the people fed me, gave me suits of clothes. I was rich when I came home that time. Pitch the show free--do a little work for people.

It was while riding the Seaboard south from Richmond that he lost his leg.

"Raleigh, got it cut off in Raleigh, coming down from Richmond. Me and another hobo. I got in jail down in Petersburg [Virginia]. They turned me loose. I told the judge I'd never get on no more trains". But then, he was always saying that! He got into trouble for riding trains again, now carrying his peg leg, but this time in Georgia, where the penal system was still archaic. He has sour recollections of the prison farms there.

The railroad people would give me 5 or 10 days. I'd make the time. I've been caught a thousand times. All down in Georgia. Roughest place there was, out on that Brown Farm. I went down on the Southern--went down to Savannah. All hobos get off at the eight-mile hill. I told them, 'I don't walk nowhere, man. I ain't gettin' off. I riding downtown.' Before I got the words out of my mouth, everybody else emptied off the train and a voice came down from the box-car, 'Hold 'em up!' I said, 'I can't. I've got to hold on here.' I came down from there and he and I walked round to the place they call the police. They come in their paddy-wagon. 30 days out there on that Brown Farm. Victor's Drive, Thunderwood, Georgia.

[Actually, this is Victory Drive, Thunderbolt. The road runs west-east through Savannah, while Thunderbolt is a small town to the immediate east.]

Time I got there, they had a piano cut, you know. When a man do anything wrong, strap his hands up there, had a hole. Let the other thing down and lock it. Then you sitting on a plank. Set your feet in the stocks down there, then they kick the plank up to your knees. I thought the fellar was playing the piano⁵. 'Oh, Cap'n,' I thought, 'it's a terrible place here'. They won't turn you loose in the daytime; turn you loose at night. Seven miles from there to Savannah. Wilderness in between... shell-hulling peas, stringing beans, all such work as that for people who couldn't work much. I run away... I went down through the wood and got into the swamp down there and it come a little shower of rain. They was looking for me. Them mosquitoes was tearing me up. I couldn't stand it no longer. Back I come. Know what they done? Took my peg from me; made me jump around. Never gave it back to me until I was ready to leave. They had number one chain gang out there; know what they do to them? Strap 'em down, naked as a jay-bird, put molasses and sugar on them. You couldn't move. Flies, black gnats and mosquitoes. Cryin' 'Cap'n, please!' but that rascal laughing himself to death. Hands stretched out. Two things side of your head where you couldn't move nothing but your mouth. Mosquitoes tearing you up.

Sam never really was a bluesman; more the embodiment of a wealth of black secular folklore. He played with many of the finest bluesmen in his neck of the woods: Jesse Lawson from Anderson, South Carolina, Jack Hemphill from Brevard, North Carolina, Arthur 'Slim' Thomas, now in Washington, D.C., who helped teach Baby Tate,⁶ McKinley Ellis, a fine left-handed guitarist from Greenville, South Carolina, whom Pete Lowry and I recorded with Baby Tate in 1970. Sam met Blind Boy Fuller, Blind Willie Walker, legendary guitar-picker from Greenville, South Carolina, Brownie McGhee--somehow he knew McGhee was in California now! -- and De Ford Bailey,

black veteran of the Grand Ole Opry, even giving us his address in Nashville. Today he plays with Henry 'Rufe' Johnson,⁷ brilliant local bluesman, with whom Sam grew up and went to school. They sometimes broadcast over a local radio station selling used cars and trailers, harkening back to Sam's days with Fenner, and Rufe's broadcasts with various gospel groups in the past.

The small country trade fairs and shows to which the Chief and Sam used to attach themselves will be the poorer for their retirement. Even if we never again see the like of these itinerant rural shows, we can at least experience some of the atmosphere in a genuine field setting.

As Sam has said, "I've made some money buskin'." If this shows the passing of the last of the medicine shows, I know it won't be the last of Sam's busking.

Since these notes were written it has been learned that 'The Chief' died on April 7th 1973.

NOTES

¹This was probably Walter B. Rogers, who later led the Victor Dance Band and Victor Military Band on record in the 1900s and 1910s.

²Bates was from Greenville, South Carolina, and made his name as a peg-leg dancer. Today he runs a club in New Jersey. Sam claims he used to play with Bates on the streets in Greenville. See Bruce Bastin, Crying for the Carolines (London: Studio Vista, 1971), p. 85.

³Brownie McGhee to Paul Oliver. See sleeve notes to Blind Boy Fuller album on Philips BBL 7512.

⁴This would seem to be rather too early.

⁵For a graphic description of these conditions, see Lawrence Gellert, Negro Songs of Protest: North and South Carolina and Georgia, New Masses, November, 1930, January 1931 and May 1932. These articles were reprinted in Nancy Cunard, The Negro (London: Pub. by Author), pp. 366-77. An album of recordings made by Gellert on location in the Carolinas and Georgia in the mid-1930s, the very period that Sam is discussing, has recently become available on Rounder LP 4001.

⁶An album on TRIX 3302 features Peg Leg Sam, together with Baby Tate and Henry Johnson (see footnote 7) on some sides. There is also a 45 of Tate and Sam on TRIX 4502. Address: P.O. Box 750, New Paltz, New York 12561. Sam also appears on Flyright 505 (Carolina Country Blues); 1973 North Carolina concert recordings.

⁷Henry Johnson has an album on TRIX 3304 (for address see footnote 6). He is accompanied by Peg Leg Sam on some of these. Johnson is also featured on 8 sides on an album of 1973 concert recordings in North Carolina on Flyright 505 (Carolina Country Blues). There is also a 45 available on Flyright 5402.

Sam. Hey, Charlie! Hey, Charlie! Hey, Charlie! Don't look, folks, I've called Charlie 40 years, and he ain't got here yet! Lord, how long I've been calling Charlie. Lord, don't go home and woop your wife if I play these blues tonight. Lord, Lord, I played 'em one night, went home and my wife told me, "Son, don't go out no more and play them blues?."

Oh, glory, hallelujah,

Voice. Play that harp around there one more time.

Sam. I'll do it in a minute. [Smacking sound is where Sam knocks harmonica on his palm to remove water. He keeps the harp in a glass of water to prevent it from drying out.]

I heard that rumbling back in top of Bald Mountain,
 Brother, I thought it was a cave coming in,
 John Henry¹ drove the steel so pop-eyed fast,
 Hey, Lord, hammer caught fire in the wind, God...
 [Here Sam 'wipes' the harp around his face, blowing through both mouth and nose.]

When John Henry was a little bitty boy,
 Sitting on his grandpappy's knee,
 Oh, he pointed his finger at a little piece of steel,
 That'll be the death of me, God....

John Henry went down on the right-hand side,
 and that steam-drill was on the left,
 "Before I let a steam-drill beat me down, Cap'n,
 I'll hammer my fool self to death, God..."

I thought I was eatin' chewing-gum! [Here he has put harp in his mouth, and moved it with his tongue while continuing to play] .

Honey, who's gonna shoe them pretty little feet,²
 Who's gonna glove them hands,
 Who's gonna kiss your red, rosey cheeks,
 Who gonna be your man, God...

John Henry's Cap'n told him,
 "Can't you see my wagon goin' to town?
 Well, I want you to buy a nine-pound hammer,
 I'll beat the steam-drill down, God..."

Boy, when that wagon got back from town that morning, funny thing, I was the water-boy,³ you know, Did you ever hear of canned(?) steel? John Henry's Cap'n told him if he had his nine-pound hammer you've been talking about, see him when he spit on his hands, rub them together, pick up that hammer, winked his eye at me, I heard him when he come in flying ...

[Imitates sounds of hammering]

John Henry's Cap'n asked him,
 "Son, ain't your hammer handle bend?"
 "Oh, no, no, Cap'n, I'm driving steel so hard,
 Hammer handle's bended in the wind, God..."

That thing stinks! [Had just played through his nose.]

John Henry's Cap'n told him, "Now, look here, son,
 Son, I hear that fast passenger train coming five miles
 up the track. Got a joint on this track, have it down
 before it gets here,

That train blows... [imitates train sounds] .

I'm glad that train didn't come through here sideways... whipped everybody off the ground. Hey, chief!

Chief. Hey, Sam!

Sam. Come up here while I get these few coins off me, here. Now, someone's gonna have to eat greens for breakfast, instead of steak(?), porkchops... how you feelin', Chief?

Chief. Sam, I feel pretty good tonight.

Sam. Yeh?

Chief. I feel pretty good tonight, Sam, and how do you feel? How do you feel Sam?

Sam. How I feel?⁴

Chief. How do you feel, Sam?

Sam. I feel like a hoop around a whiskey-keg.

Chief. A hoop around a whiskey-keg? How's that Sam?

Sam. All the way around it, Chief, and wish to God that I was in it.

Chief. I bet you do... Sam, I want you to stay with me and help me a little while.

Sam. Well, you know I'll do that, Chief.

Chief. The reason I ask you is because a man and his wife come here this morning, and the wife said to me, "Chief, I'm glad you're back". I said, "Well, it's glad to be back". She said, "I've come here to see that big old rattlesnake you had. Have you still got him? I said, "I believe I have". She said, "I'd sure like to see that snake". I said, "Alright. If I can get old Sam to help me", I said, "we'll bring him out here and stretch him out and let you take a good look at him".⁵ By the way, Sam, that's where you come in.

Sam. That's where I go out.

Chief. But, Sam, all I want you to do, all I want you to do, you take the old rattlesnake by the head and I'll take him by the tail, and we'll stretch him out here and let the good folks look at him.

Sam. What you say there now Chief?

Chief. All I want you to do, take the old rattlesnake by the head and I'll take him by the tail and we'll stretch him out here and let the good folks look at him.

Sam. Chief, let's visa-vers that thing.

Chief. What'd you mean, visa-vers it Sam?

Sam. You hold head and let me hold tail.

Chief. You want me to hold the head? Well, Sam, you're not afraid of a rattlesnake are you?

Sam. I ain't scared of but two-three kinds.

Chief. You're only afraid of but three kinds of snakes? But just a moment, what kinds are they?

- Sam. Little one, big one and a dead one.
- Chief. Why, you won't have to be afraid of this old snake, he won't bite you Sam. He won't bite you.
- Sam. Who ever heard of a snake won't bite, how come it wouldn't, and how come I ain't got to be scared and how come you say he won't bite me?
- Chief. Well, I raised him from a baby Sam, I raised this old snake from a baby. He will not bite you.
- Sam. What that got to do with him biting about you raisin' him from a baby?
- Chief. Why, Sam, this old rattlesnake was raised on milk. He was raised on milk, Sam, and he will not bite you.
- Sam. Ye, Chief, I was raised on milk too, but I eat meat now you know.
- Chief. Why, Sam, you don't understand what I mean, when I say he will not bite you, now I mean that, he will not bite you, Sam.
- Sam. How come?
- Chief. Well, he's a very old snake, he's very old Sam. He will not bite you.
- Sam. What's oldness got to do with a snake's biting - biteness?
- Chief. He can't bite you, Sam. He cannot bite you.
- Sam. Well, how come?
- Chief. Well, this old snake ain't got no teeth. He's got no teeth, Sam, he can't bite you.
- Sam. Yeh, Chief, but he can gum you.
- Chief. Gum you, well, I guess he could gum you... Alright, I'll tell you what to do...

Some of you will go on a fishing trip and if you do neighbour, you might get bit by a deadly, poison rattlesnake. Now if you ever do get bit by a rattlesnake, neighbour you had better know what to do, and do it very quick, because, friend, you haven't got long to live. You have about one hour to get to your good doctor. Now in case that you cannot get to your good doctor in one hour, that's where I come in, and if I can save one man, one woman or one little child while I'm here, my work here has been complete, and I can truthfully say that I have saved hundreds of men, women and children's lives every place I go. Some of you remember me a few years ago, I'm the same old Indian that had the pleasure of saving a little girl's life. I had my wife with me. We were driving through your highway, not too far from here, we noticed a gathering of people standing on the road. My wife said, "You'd better stop". She said, "There might be an accident; maybe we can help somebody". I drew up and stopped and got out of the car and asked a man, was there an accident. The man said, "Chief, a little girl just got bit by a rattlesnake". I said, "Where's she at?" He said, "She's sitting right over there underneath a tree with her mother".

The wife and I walked over and I noticed the mother sitting on the ground and the little girl was lying in her lap. She looked up at me and the wife and said, "Pardon me, are you folks Indians?" I said, "Yes, m'am." She said, "Do you know anything about a rattlesnake?" I said, "I most certainly do". She said, "My little girl just got bit. We stopped here to rest, and while we were resting" she said, "the little girl had saw some flowers along the highway".

She asked her mother if she could walk over and pick up a few flowers while they were resting and her mother says, "Yes". The little girl walked over and reached down to pick up a beautiful flower. There happened to be a rattlesnake there. He coiled up and he jumped and he bit the little girl right on her arm. Neighbour, her little arm was swelling up twice its size. She had a very high temperature fever, just about out of her head. The mother said, "Can you do anything for my baby?" I said, "Yes, m'am. I can save your daughter's life. I can save her life". She said, "If you can, please take my money, take my car, take everything I've got but do something quick". I looked at her for a moment. I said, "Lady, I'm sorry. You don't have to pay me". The wife and I ran back to my car and I got something and brought it back. I took the poison from that little girl's arm, I took the swelling down from her arm, I took the fever down from her little head, I said, "Mother, leave her lay down about twenty minutes". After twenty minutes, we stood the little girl on her feet. As that little girl gradually opened her eyes, she started to smile. The mother said, "Is my daughter alright?" I said, "Lady, your daughter is perfectly alright. You can take her home". I had men and women standing there with tears in their eyes and not a soul knew what to do.

I'm going to show you what I can do right in front of your very eyes. I want you to watch this. Now I'm the only man that comes here and does this. I want somebody here today, I don't care how old you are, I don't care how young you are, I want somebody tonight with rheumatism. If you got rheumatism right now down your knee so bad you can't bend your knee, I'm going to give you the same thing I gave that little girl. And that's one of my little bottles here. Take this little bottle. Go anyplace on the grounds here tonight, open that bottle, take some of that oil in your hand, rub that down your knee like that and exercise your knee up and down. Neighbour, one minute by your clock or watch, I'll take the pain, the ache, the swelling, the stiffness, the soreness from your knee.

And if you're standing here right now, and you cannot raise your hand above your head like that, lot of people call it bursitis up here in the joints, take some of that oil, rub it in that shoulder, and neighbour, lift that hand up and down in one minute. But if you've got an old mother and father at home, like I have, somebody with rheumatism in their back so bad they can't sleep, you go home tonight, take some in their hand, tell them to rub it in their back. Now tell them to bend up and down, one or two times is all they need, Lady, I'll do something quicker than that; watch this'n. I'll do something quicker than that. Now here's something hard to believe but you can do this right here. No if there's anybody standing out there with a headache, I'm going to relieve you of that headache in one minute.

A man said, "How much is that bottle?" That bottle sells in every reputable drug-store for two dollars. That's a family-size bottle. I used to bring it here in small bottles, very small bottles, for \$1. It's a \$2 bottle in every drug-store. . . family size bottle; enough to last you all year. I'm not going to charge you \$2 tonight. This is my first demonstration tonight, so tonight on my first demonstration,⁶ I'm going to cut the price in two. I'm going to give you a \$2 bottle for the small price of \$1, with this understanding and guarantee. Neighbours, you don't have to go home to use the bottle, you can go anyplace on the grounds and use it and if I fail to relieve you of a headache, fail to relieve you of a toothache, fail to give you the greatest relief you ever had, for rheumatism, pains, stiff joints, swellings, don't keep it. Bring the bottle back and get your little dollar bill back. I'll ask old Sam to wait upon you.

Sam. Sold, Chief. [There follows about 1 min. in which the Chief continues to sell the medicine as Sam moves through the crowd, taking money.] I ain't gonna beg nobody.

Chief. Don't beg anybody, Sam.

Sam. I been quit beggin'.

Chief. I know you have, Sam. Don't beg anybody.

Sam. I ain't gonna beg nobody.

Chief. Don't beg now, Sam.

Sam. Somebody, please buy this one!

Chief. Alright, come on in now. Come on in, Sam.

Sam. I'm coming on in.

Chief. Sam's gonna entertain you now, he's gonna make you laugh. I want you to watch him. Now he's gonna make you laugh, tonight, so if you stand here, you're in for a wonderful treat here tonight. Sam, are you gettin' about ready?

[At this point a heckler starts up in the audience.]

Sam. You gonna do that? I tell you, somebody put some rags in his mouth. If the good Lord hadn't have had a steady hand in cutting a hole when he was making his mouth, cut his whole damn head off...way back to his ears. You worry me to death, boy.

Voice. I know it.

Sam. The devil ought to take a hammer when he get down there?? [obliterated by heckler].

Voice. Come on. We're going to pay you whether you tell us or not. We want it.

Sam. [Smacking harp in hand and knocking out water] I bet he ain't got that much brains in his head. Addle-brained brother...that's a addle-brained brother. Don't think nobody see him unless he make a lot of noise.

Voice. I'm going to make a lot. I want you to sell what you got 'cause I want's some of it.

Sam. I got something for you after a while.

Voice. I got the money if you got the time. Come on, Sam.

Sam. If you get home tonight, I'll eat you up but I ain't gonna hurt you. When I make you, your pants'll be down below your knees.

Voice. Come on, Sam.

Sam. Now, if you'll just be quiet brother. Can you be quiet for just one minute?

Voice. I will. Alright.

Sam. I wanna see. I wished I had some okra, put in your mouth sideways.

[As Sam starts to play, the heckler, who had sat down on the ground, says, "But I can't keep still though!"]

That's what I want, them... Hey pretty mama, they just want doin',
Soft 'n easy, good 'n greasy,
Oh, how I love those... [Here he makes the harp'speak' some of
the words] I'm crazy about them...

Now, mister, I'm a man, I come from New Orleans,
Crazy about my greasy greens,
I can't get 'em three times a day,
I get mad and walk on away
But them... certainly is good,)
Hey, Lord, I'd eat 'em all if I could,) Refrain
Soft 'n easy etc. etc.)

Now, way down south, where I was born,
Raised good, good greens and corn,
Sweet potater and black-eyes peas,
Green 'mater, man and pecan trees
Refrain.....

Now, little girl, don't you tell me what your mama don't allow,
I want some greens anyhow,
Quick as I eat 'em, sugar, I'll be gone,

Your mama won't know which slip(?) I'm on,
Oh, sure is good, people smell them all 'round in the
neighbourhood,
Refrain....

Now, Miss Sassie(?) Green, up on the shelf,
Must be savin' them for someone else,
I had some greens in that pot,
How much greasy greens you got?
Refrain.....

Now, mister, that meat, it must've been fat,
You cook greens so greasy like that,
Use nothing but natural 'leen,
Sho' God cooked some whopping good greens,
Refrain.....⁷

Oh, yeh. Ate some for breakfast this morning!

¹ Having drawn his crowd, Sam always commences with John Henry. It is certainly a song that gains considerably from visual as much as aural consideration, as far as he is concerned. He uses his arms to emphasise the driving, punctuating musical dynamics with physical emphasis. His audiences really enjoyed seeing this song performed and it was always requested after the show was over, and, provided they paid over some money, Sam would do it again. This is not the place to re-evaluate John Henry, but it might be the place to throw out comments which might lead to just such a re-evaluation. Early studies concentrated on establishing the historical validity of John Henry, and Guy B. Johnson, Tracking down a Negro Legend (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1929) and Louis W. Chappel, John Henry, a Folk-lore Study (Jena: Walter Biedermann, 1933) provided details here. These, and further voluminous material, have been correlated by Richard M. Dorson, John Henry, Western Folk-lore 24 (1965) and MacEdward Leach, "John Henry", Folk-lore and Society, ed. Bruce Jackson (Hatboro, Pennsylvania: Folk-lore Associates, 1966). Both Alan Lomax, The Folk Songs of North America (New York: 1967) and Roger D. Abrahams, Deep Down in the Jungle (Hatboro, Penna: Folklore Associates, 1964) saw the sexual symbolism in John Henry, analysing it in Freudian terms, stressing that the singers knew that John Henry died from love-making not work. Both Johnson and Leach stress the significance of the phonograph record in spreading the John Henry legend. If there is truth in that, it is also certain that many musicians who commenced their musical training before 1920 recall it as one of the first songs they ever learned. The legend was strong and functional well before the advent of the phonograph record. It is this functionalism that has never adequately been investigated. Why has this song remained significant after well over half a century? In Urban Blues (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), Charles Keil makes a plea for a study of "artist-audience interaction patterns, roles and status of musicians, sociology of the small musical group and aspects of socio-musical behaviour" (p.209). Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss saw "that music is a language by whose means messages are elaborated, that such messages can be understood by the many ... and that it... unites the contradictory character of being at once intelligible and untranslatable." (Edmund Leach, Claude Levi-Strauss: New York, The Viking Press, 1970, p. 125). Folksongs have a function at least equal to, and perhaps more important than, mere physical existence.

² This is from Child ballad 76, Lass of Roch Royal, common enough in American songs, and also in John Henry. What is interesting is the persistence of a white stanza in this black ballad. Most fascinating of Peg Leg Sam's 'white' versions is his -very black! - version of the old English ballad, Froggie went a-courting. In Rainbow in the Morning, ed. J. Frank Dobie, Publications of the Texas Folklore Society Number V, Folklore Associates Inc, Hatboro, Penna: 1965 are some Texas versions of "The Frog's Courting" by L.W. Payne, Jr. 16th century versions exist... possibly in Wedderburn's The Complaint of Scotland (1549).

³ It is interesting to see the personal involvement that Sam brings in here.

⁴ At this stage, and at others during his performance, Sam takes on the role of the simple, subservient 'Sambo', a direct hold-over from the minstrel stage.

⁵ This was always the routine, in that the crowd's attention would be drawn by the inference that a snake would be brought out. This became a joke and fed easily into the Chief's story about saving the girl's life.

⁶ Typical of the salesman in the Chief, this was from the Friday night show. On the Saturday night, he had altered it to... "As this is my last demonstration here..."

⁷ This also shows Sam's use of double-entendre. He considers this song as a trademark of his, although he probably learned it, along with much of his medicine show repertoire, from Pink Anderson. Pink has a version on Prestige/Bluesville LP 1051, Pink Anderson Vol. 2. Medicine Show Man. This song was collected as early as 1904-16 in Lafayette County, Mississippi. Howard W. Odum, "Folk-song and Folk-poetry as Found in the Secular Songs of the Southern Negro," Journal of American Folklore, XXIV, (October-December, 1911), 396.

Sam: Yeh, I never will forget. . . I never will forget. . . I had a sad accident to happen to me. Sad, sad accident. I was laying down in my own house, tending to my own business. You know, I take my beauty nap every day at noon and I sleep with my mouth open. You know, a rat took my mouth to be a rat-hole and ran in and I swallowed him down. I jumped up and I said, "Wifey!" She said, "What is it?" "Oh!", I said, "I've swallered a rat". She said, "Now there you go. Me and the doctor just brought you out from down yonder, and now we got to send you right back down there". I said, "No! I swallered a rat, sure enough". She said, "How'd it happen?" I said, "I was laying down, flat on my back, y'know, I take my beauty nap, I sleep with my mouth open". I said, "Rat took my mouth to be a rat-hole and he run in there and I swallered him down." She said, "Hadn't you better go and see a doctor?" I said, "I reckon so".

That rat was cuttin' up my stomache when I got down to that doctor's office. I said, "Doc. I got a rat eatin' on my stomache." He said, "Yeh, and we got to send you right back down where you come, that's where you're goin'". I said, "No doc", "You done gone and lost your mind again, I reckon". I said, "No doc, I gone and swallered a rat." He said, "How'd it happen?" I said, "I was layin' down flat on my back - you know, I take my beauty nap every day at twelve, y'know, good lookin' rascal like me - yeh, 'n I sleep with my mouth open, and a rat took my mouth to be a rat-hole, and he run in there and I swallered him down." He said, "There ain't much I can do about that but I can give you good advice." I said, "Doc, please, give me that good advice, sir." He said, "You go up there to that grocery store, you get yourself 10c worth of good old, strong, Limburger cheese." I said, "Yessir, Doc." And he said, "You go get you an old Thomas cat." I said, "Yessir, Doc." "You go back down to your own house, and lay down flat on your back, place that cat on your chest and cheese on your chin. When that rat get to smellin' that good ol' Limburger cheese, he come up and that cat catch him." I said, "Yessir, Doc."

I done just like what the doctor said you know. I went on up there to the grocery store and slapped the dime on the counter and said, "Give me 10c worth of that good old, strong Limburger cheese, please groceryman, and make 'em strong." Yeh, he cut me off a piece. . . I could smell it while he was cuttin' it you know, I believe that rat smelled it too, 'cause he turned over in my stomache one time. Now I didn't have no Thomas cat but I knew where an old lady stay. She couldn't hear nor see good either, so I borrowed that cat. People say I stole it but stealin' and borrowin's the same thing; if you borrow something, you know you ain't going to pay it back, if you steal something, you know you ain't gonna carry it back! So I borrowed that cat. I went on down to my own house, taking that doctor's advice. I lay down flat on my back, placed the cat on my chest, cheese on my chin. I was layin' there, y'know, well, bye 'n bye, that rat came to smellin' that good old Limburger cheese, I could feel him when he was comin' on up; I could feel him making a step-ladder out of my ribs, a-comin' on up. After a while, that rat made a dive for the cheese, 'n the cat made a dive for the rat. Right there's where I did it. Oh, I did it! Damned if I didn't swaller rat, cat, cheese 'n all! Yeh, funny things happen in this world, y'know. I never will forget, when me and a Britishman and a Frenchman, we were discussing who could stand the most gas.⁸ I said, I could stand the most for good old America, and the Britishman said, "I could stand it for the Englishmen," and the Frenchman said, "Bon soir, bon soir, I can stand it too." Yes. We never had no gas, never had enough money to buy none but I tell you what we done. We got a big old billy-goat and we put him in a airtight room, and run him 'round in there. First thing went in there was the Frenchman. He went in for, put in for France. He stayed in there two seconds, came out with his hand over his nose. . . "Bon soir, bon soir, bon soir." Next one, the Britisher. He went in for Great Britain, y'know. He went in there and he stayed about two seconds and he came out. . . "I got enough, I got enough, I got enough, I got enough!" I's goin' in for good old America, you know. Yeh, I said, "Let me in there." They run in there and run the billy-goat round two or three minutes, then told me, "Jump in

there!" I run in there and run him round through there agin, then I'd run round through there myself and jumped up and down, pulled off my coat and held up my arms. Know what happened? Damn goat come out!

People hollerin' about Uncle Sam this, Uncle Sam that... uncle Sam t'other. Look what it done for the poor little pitiful womanfolk. Made times so tight on them, they couldn't buy powder, they had to use flour. Wasn't nothin' for me on a hot July day, when they get to sweatin' and walkin' down the street, I just reach my hand under their chins, kept biscuits droppin' off. People hollerin' about Uncle Sam this, Uncle Sam that... look what it done for me! Put me on a little old ? box back suit, threw a rifle in my arms, stuck a bayonette on it, put a soldier on my right-hand side and a soldier on my left-hand side and a jack-legged preacher behind me. He opened up a little testament, cried, "March on, march on my three brave men that are victors, march on." Man on my right-hand side, he got shot out. Old reverend didn't make it a bit better. "March on, my two brave men, that are victors, march on." Man on my left-hand side, he get shot down. Old reverend didn't make it no better. "March on, my one brave man, of the victors, march on." I said, "Yes, reverend, but it's time to cut out(?) now." When I struck out and them Germans shot at me, I heard the bullet twice. Hear it one time when it passed me and I heard it when I passed it again down the road. Yessir. Old reverend couldn't get close enough to catch nothin' but the tip end of my coat-tails. He was right behind me. When he caught hold to the tip-end of my coat-tails, he opened up that little testament, "Don't run, son,. By God we live and by God we die." I said, "Yes, reverend, turn my coat-tails loose and by God I'm gonna fly!"

Yeh, here's a piece of paper here⁹ ... you know what it say? Lord, God... this is Jew's paper¹⁰, y'know, I found it in a Jew's back-yard. There's an old man, was getting off a streetcar, and his foot slipped and he broke his leg, they carried him to the hospital and he died instantly. Now mine don't read over here like this; you know what it say here?

Old man (cut off a little shorter), street car,
Feet slipped, there he are.

Look it here though... there ain't no need of going through a whole lot of great details like this, look what it say here. Heh, heh, heh. Sam Jones' pool-room, his wife brought his dinner to him, on a market day and the wind blew her dress up a little, and a little boy laughed. Sam Jones took a pool-stick and knocked his eye out. Carried him to the hospital and he died instantly. Now it don't read that way over here. Look what it say on this side, it's cut off a little shorter, but it's the same thing.

Wind blew, dress high,
Boy looked, lost eye.

Whoa, yeh... looka here, old lady Kate. Now looka here... old lady Kate, she was the mother of 28 children. They took her to the hospital this morning, and she died instantly. Now you turn right back over here, you ain't gotta go through no long details, look what it say:

Old lady Kate, she had 28,
She would've had another'n, but damned if it ain't too late.

I never will forget when I was on that trolley-car that time, in Philadelphia, Pennysylvania. I was on that trolley-car and I was sittin' down-side of a big fat momma. After a while, we rode a little piece, the man said, "Ding, ding". I said, "What's happenng?" He said, "Haul off, big boy, this's as far as I'm goin'." That big fat momma got off; she changed every time I changed. Look like she weighed about 400 lbs. Yeh... after a while I rode, it looked like, umpteen more miles, my money's gettin' a little littler and a little littler. After a while, that street-car man said, "Ding, ding." I said, "What's happening?"

He said, "Haul off, big boy, this's as far as I'm goin'." I got off. Big fat momma got off right aside of me. My money's gettin' a little littler and a little lower. I rode about humpteen more blocks and that street-car conductor yelled, "Ding, ding." I said, "What's happening?" He said, "Haul off, big boy, this's as far as I'm going." Yessir. Me and that big fat momma got off and changed cars. After a while we were riding on that'n and after a while two trolley-cars - trolley-car met another trolley-car and had a collision. Knocked me and that momma down a big 50-foot field. Every once in a while, she'd roll over on me and after a while, I'd roll over on her. After a while, she'd roll over on me and then again I'd roll over on her. When we hit down the bottom of that field, she was on top of me. I never had no bell to ring but I told her, I said, "Haul off big fat momma." She said, "How come?" I said, "This's as far as I'm goin'." Yessir, funny things happen in this world.

I never will forget, when I was on that train. Yessir, I was on the train, y'know, and a wino come through there and first spoke to me, "How're you, mister?" "All right, how're you?" And a lady sitting over there with a baby in her lap, y'know. He was kinda on the ugly side, y'know. His mouth was long enough to eat peas out of a jug. Yeh, and that wino looked over there and spotted him. He said, "Hic. Lady, that's kinda an ugly little baby you got there." Lady said, "That's my baby." He said, "I can't help who it is, he sure God is ugly!" That wino, y'know, walking through the train. She said, "Don't talk about my baby like that." She commenced crying; the conductor came running in there, say, "What's the matter, lady?" She said, "That old wino talking about my baby. Said he's ugly". Conductor said, "Well we don't 'low nobody to insult people's on this train." He called the cook-chef, cook - he says, "Come here. Come in here. You fix this lady a plate." And he walked back to the door and looked back and said, "By the way, fix the monkey one too." The baby y'know. Yeh. Funny things happen in this world. Funny things happen in this world.

I'm standing here, thinkin' and thoughtin' 'bout a grown man, a grown man, a man that would take his fist and hit a woman, he ought to be carried elevty-'leven miles above the clouds and made to walk back. I never in my life seen my pa raise his hands disaway to hit my ma, he always uppercut the old lady. [Man lights a match at the front and makes a neighbour jump.] A little fire... you ain't scared of fire is you, the way you bin flirtin'? You got to go down in torment and meet that old man down there with a pitchfork. Yeh...

I'm thinkin' and thoughtin' 'bout back in ancient times, in ancient times, when bullfrogs was ? ? ?. Back in ancient times, when bullfrogs ? ? ?, boy goes to see a girl, they sittin' on an old settie about these many wide [measures with his hands], ma a-settin' over there with half a box of snuff in her mouth, pa settin' over there with an old cob pipe in his mouth, an old eight-day clock settin' up on the shelf, "Take yo' time, take yo' time, take yo' time." But nowadays things have changed. Boy go to see a girl now, pa gone to the poker-game, ma gone to the bear-garden. That boy squashed, squeezed down in a little old settie 'bout dese many big, little old 98c clock sittin' up on the shelf, "Git-together, git-together, git-together!"

Funny things happen in this world. Funny things in this world happen.

I never will forget when I was on that train, that train headin' for Mobile. Mobile, Alabama. And I sat down aside of a pretty, a pretty teenage gal. She weighed about 150... my size you know. Time I sat down aside of her, I said, "Excuse me lady, I'm a drummer from Mobile¹¹." She didn't say anything at all, y'know. We rode on down a little piece further, I said, Lady, I'm a drummer from Mobile; what might be your name?" She didn't say anything. After a while we passed by a man, he was ploughing one of them long-eared donkeys. And he give a whoop 'bout time we got by him, went, "Hee-haw, hee-haw." I said, "Seuse me lady, I'm a drummer from Mobile. Can you tell what's that out there a-hollerin' like that?" She said, "The way its feets look, and way its ears flop down, and the way he hollers, he's like another one of them damn drummers from Mobile!"

Yeh, funny things happen in this world. Yeh... After them few remarks, I'm indeligated to sing you a song; the title of it is, never go around with a man's wife 'less'n you can go two rounds with him.

My daddy tole me one time, he said, "Son," I said, "Yessir, pa." He said, "I know where some cub bears at and I know 'xactly when time that old mammy bear leave." I said, "Yessir, pa." He said, "I want you to... reckon you can go down there with me?" I said, "Yeh, I'll go down, sir." We went down to the bear's den, y'know... I had one of the pawinest pas since pa's got to be pa's... and I had one of the rouguishest pa's, ever since pa's got to be pa's... he could steal a chicken off the porch and leave the feathers up there cackling! He said, "I know where those cub bears at now." I said, "Yessir." He said, "I want you to go down there with me." Pa had an old mule they call Seymour... yeh, pa fed him well y'know. Reckon they call him Seymour was that you could see more ribs than you could mule. Yeh... I'm warmin' up! Yeh... Old Seymour could trot so fast that they'd have to get somebody to hold the hose in front of him to keep his feet from catching on fire. Yeh, everybody call him 'Razor-back Eighty' but his right name was Seymour. Boy, they fed him high. Pa fed old Seymour high. Put Seymour in the stable and throw'd the hay in the loft. Yeh, he said, "Let's go down there. I want you to rob them old cub bears... she leave at twelve o'clock every day. "Said, "I've been watching her for three days." I said, "Alright, pa." We went on down there. We got to the den and sure enough the mammy bear was gone. Pa say, "Now you stay up on here then, I'm going down in the den." I said, "Alright, pa." Pa went down on that den, wasn't two minutes time before mamma bear come. When she come, she run by me and run in the hole and I grabbed her by the tail. Pa hollered up and say, "Hey, son." I said, "Yessir?". "What darken the hole?" I said, "You'll find out if this tail-hold break!" 12 Yessir... funny things happen.

Man you better straighten up and (fly right),
Oh, you better straighten up now and...
Oh, you better straighten up and...

When the buzzard took the monkey a ride in the air,
Monkey thought everything was on the square,
Way up in the air, tried to slip him from his back,
Arms around his neck, said, "Straighten up, Jack!"

Now you better straighten up and... refrain..

And the buzzard told the monkey, say "You're choking me!
Release this tight hold, swear to God I'll set you free,
Monkey looked the buzzard right dead in the eye,
"That's sound teaching, Jack, I believe you's telling a lie." 13

You better straighten up, big boy, and... refrain.

Oh, I went to a church, laid my hat on a seat,
Lady sat down on it, said, "Ain't this sweet?"
"Scuse me lady, you got me wrong,
Let me have that thing you're sitting down on."

You better straighten up now and... refrain.

Now I met a little girl they called Cherry Red,
Shimmied in front? the fool fell dead,
Shimmied in a Cadillac, shimmied on a Ford,
God, she shook it on the running-board,

You better straighten up and... refrain.

Hey, Chief. Oh, there he is! Yes, I'd thought he was done gone on...

⁸This obviously dates from the 1917-18 World War, as does the following joke.

⁹At this point, Sam takes a piece of paper from his pocket. He pretends that on one side the story is written out in full and that, as he turns over, it is written in these short couplets.

¹⁰The reference here is to the small, infering miserly, size of the paper. Later, he refers to a Jewish suit. This would suggest that these motifs are 'borrowed' from white medicine show performers, as anti-Semitism was not a marked black trait.

¹¹The reference here is to early travelling salesmen, whose jobs were to 'drum' up trade, hence the term 'drummer'. A detailed study of rural commerce states that "the period from 1870 to 1900 was the great age for the drummers". Gerald Carson, The Old Country Store (Chicago: William Benton, 1969), p. 490. Drummers disappeared under competition first from mail order houses and, later, a free rural delivery postal service. Sam's reference to a drummer here seems to date the origin of the joke.

¹²This was one of many jokes that Sam had learned from Pink Anderson and was taped from Pink in August 1970.

¹³These first two stanzas are related to many Negro folktales and the monkey is related to the trickster figure, considered in many other Negro folksongs by Abrahams, op. cit. In Mules and Men (Philadelphia, Penna: J. B. Lippincott, 1935), Negro folklore collector, Zora Neale Hurston, relates a tale told by John French, in which the trickster figure, Jack, jumps on the back of an eagle to gain a lift, in order to see the devil. John French was recorded in 1935 by Hurston and Alan Lomax, and will appear on a Flyright-Matchbox LP, which will include many of the blues recorded during this brief field-trip into the South-eastern states.

- Sam. Hey, Chief.
- Chief. Hey, Sam.
- Sam. Yes, yes... there's my old friend. Me'n him's been friends for many, many years.
- Many, many years we been friends.
- Chief. That's right, Sam. We've been friends for many, many years, haven't we?
- Sam. Yes... we'll keep on being friends.
- Chief. That's right, friend. Many, many years, friend.
- Sam. Friends to the end.
- Chief. Friends to the end, that's right, Sam.
- Sam. Lend me a dollar.
- Chief. Well, that's the end. Right there, Sam.
- Sam. Well, that friendship didn't last long, did it? Sure didn't.
- Chief. Give me some water here... I'm going to show you something. I'm going to show you folks something here. A lady come here this morning... her and her sister... lady said to me, "Chief, I want to buy about \$25 worth of the same thing that you sold my sister last year." I said, "Well, what did I sell her?" She said, "I got a little piece in my pocket here... d'you want to see it?" I said, "I do." She showed it to me and I said, "Well, I got a-plenty of it." "I want to buy \$25 worth of it. I said, "Lady, why d'you want so much of it?" "Oh," she said, "I don't live around here. I live in Washington. I've got a beauty parlour there and I use that in my beauty parlour. It's the best thing I've ever had and I want to buy \$25 worth of it. I said, "We'll be glad to help you." I want to show you what it is here. Let me have some water.
- Sam. There you go.
- Chief. I'll show you what it is. Here it is, right here. See that? A man said to me, "Oh, that's a soap." "No, man," I said, "this is not a soap. This is known all over the United States as that famous, old-fashioned Indian vegetable compound. It's the same thing as happened at your state fair [where the Chief and Sam had been]. I was at your state fair and a lady came to me and said, "Well, Chief, I've heard so much about you. I live out here in the country about 5 miles and everybody who comes to my home, they tell me to come to see you. You have helped a lot of people. I said, "Yes, m'am, I have helped a few." She said, "That's the reason I came about my husband. I want to see if you can make my husband's hair grow!" an she pulled off his hat. Well, neighbour, that old man was as bald as a billiard-ball. I looked at her for a moment and said, "Lady, I'm sorry. I can't make his hair grow." "Oh," she said, "everybody tells me that you can make people's hair grow." She said, "Chief, my old man's been bald-headed for 10 years and Lord knows I hate a bald-headed man." I said, "Lady, I'm sorry. You're stuck with him; I can't help him." She said, "Now tell me. Why can't you make his hair grow? Why can't you?" Well, this is what I told her. I said, "Lady, if I could make that man's hair grow, I would only need two customers." She said, "Who was that?" I said, "That would be Jack Benny and Bing Crosby, because they're both as bald-headed as that table. Did you know that? And they are both millionaires. They have offered a million dollars to anyone that can make their hair grow and nobody can do it. She said, "Well, there must be a reason." I said, "Sure there is." She said, "Can you tell me?" I said, "I can tell you."

Here's what I told her. I said, "Lady, whenever you are bald-headed, you are telling me this; that the roots of your hair are dead, that the roots are dead. Lady, your hair is like a big, beautiful tree. When the roots are dead, the big tree falls and the wind blows the tree away. Lady, your hair is like a beautiful little flower. When the roots are dead, the little flower falls, the wind blows the flowers away. And the same thing with your hair. When the roots are dead the hair falls out and the wind blows your hair away. There's only one man who can bring the dead back to life, there's only one man who can make the blind see, the deaf hear, the dumb talk and the lame walk. That is none other than who the Indians call and worship, that is the Great Spirit, my friend, the Great Spirit. You call him God."

"Oh, there's a lot of things I can't do, but neighbour, there's a few things I can do, and one of the greatest of all is going to make you a walking and talking advertisement for me, my brothers and sisters, my concern as long as you live. . . and here it is. I can save you from becoming a bald-headed man or woman. I can give you back a beautiful, healthy head of hair. Now neighbour, I don't care if you got dandruff so bad that you got to scratch your head day and night, I can stop your dandruff in one night, I can do it. . . yeh, I'll show you. With that little thing right there. A man said, "That's a soap." No, this is not a soap. This is known all over the United States as that famous, old-fashioned Indian vegetable compound. Old as old hills. . . old-fashioned vegetable compound. This is made by the Indian women and children. I'm going to show you how to make it right in front of your very eyes; watch this.

Now this is only made once a year, every spring of the year. I'm going to put a little water on my hands and arms. I'll show you how it's made. Now every spring of the year, the Indian women and children go way back in the woods and the mountains and they hunt for hours until they find that plant. Once she finds that plant, she pulls them up at the roots, she brings them home and she cleans and washes them, like I'm doing on my hands here.¹⁴ After she cleans and washes those plants very thoroughly, she puts all of those plants into a big old tub and now she starts to cook and boil those plants for hours. After cooking and boiling for hours, here's what she does next. Now she takes a large stick and she churns them up and down, just like the old-fashioned people used to make butter with a churn and a stick. . . After churning for hours, it does become thick and heavy, like it's going to do on my hands and arms; now watch this. Now after that becomes very thick and heavy, she takes it back out of the pot, she lies that on a large cloth and the sun up there hits that for 4 days, until it becomes hard. When it becomes hard, she takes a little knife and cuts them into squares, just as you see. Now, when you go home, I want each and everyone of you to take one of these home. I'm going to give you one.

Now, those of you that are losing your hair, those of you that have hair that is falling and breaking, those of you who scratch your head day and night with dandruff, I want you to wash your head like I show you. Now, remember washing your hair, remember, always wash your hands first. Wash your hands first. Put some more of this back on your hands. Now you wash your head like I show you. When washing your hair, remember, always use your finger-tips, always use your finger-tips, always work in a round circle, rotary-motion like that, all over your head. And I want you men and boys especially to work hard on top and work hard in front. You say, "Why?" Because those two places are the first places where you men and boys get bald-headed, either on top or in front. Work hard, either one, two or three minutes. Now watch it. . . after one, two or three minutes, here's what's happening. Notice some of that oil penetrates, some of that oil goes down to the roots of your head, that loosens all the dirt, the grease, the grime, the filth and the corruption from the roots of your hair.¹⁵ Now you take the warm water. Rinse your head off in warm water first, and last but not least, take some cold water, rinse your head off in cold water, dry your hair and go to bed.

Oh, you can laugh at us Indians if you want to, but remember, lady, you have never saw a bald-headed Indian in your life.

A man said, "How much is it and where can I buy it?" Now remember, you can not buy this in no five and ten cent store. You cannot buy this in no supermarket. You cannot buy this in no grocery store. The price is \$1, no more and no less. And for \$1, here's what you get. Neighbour for \$1 you get a package of three of these for \$1. A packet of three of them for \$1. You say that's a lot of money! Watch this. That one little bar will outlast four and five cakes of any soap near home. I'm going to give you a dollar's worth... I'm going to give you a present. I'm going to give you a dollar's worth. I'm going to stop your hair from falling. I'm going to stop dandruff, I'm going to stop an itchy scalp. I'm going to give you back a healthy head of hair. I'm going to smooth up your face of pimples and bumps and sores, smooth up your body with itch, and eczema and poison ivy. I'm even going to stop your old, tired, aching feet for \$1.

And tonight, I'm gonna... my first demonstration, I'm gonna give everybody a present. Everybody who takes a dollar's worth from me tonight, I'm going to make you a present of another one. To somebody who has dandruff it's worth a \$100 bill. I'll give you another one free of charge. You men shave... you can use that for shaving. It's worth a \$100 just to shave with that one. Now I'll give you that one free of charge. Let me give you another one. You might have children in your home, put that in the bathroom for your children. Give everybody a packet; there's 6 of these.¹⁶ Tonight, for just \$1, I'm going to ask Sam to wait upon you. [Sam's calls and chief's selling continue for about 3 minutes, then...]

Chief. ... and now we're going to start the show, ladies and gentlemen, You're in for a wonderful treat and later on, if he has time, he's gonna dance for you. Some of you have never saw this man dance in your life. You're going to have that opportunity tonight to watch him. A man said to me today, "I don't believe he can dance with that one foot." You stay here and watch him 'cause he can do it. He's the best dancer you ever saw in your life. He's gonna do that tonight. Now, he's going to entertain you first. He's going to entertain you in a very novel way, so give him your attention for a few minutes. Now he's gonna make you laugh. Now if you don't laugh or can't laugh, you had better go to see your family doctor, 'cause something's wrong with you, when this man can't make you laugh. He's going to prove it to you. Are you ready, Sam?

Sam. I stay ready to keep from gettin' ready. What you want, soap? There's another one over there, Chief. Blessed is he that commeth at the eleventh hour.

In Heaven alone, no sin is found,
And there's no weeping up there,
But on a bald-headed man's head there ain't no hair,
And God knows there won't be no scratchin' and diggin'
up there.

I'm the palminest palm ever since palms got to be palms (?)

My poor old mother-in-law, she died last night,
How my poor heart did yearn,
I know that old soul's floatin' with the angels above,
'Cause she's too damn tough to burn.¹⁷

You look at me, now, you look at a man that's been murdered. I've been murdered three times; murdered and married's the same thing - one's a sure death, the other a slow death. Gwine die anyhow. First woman I got married to, three weeks before I got married to her, I thought I loved

her so good, I could eat her up. Two days after I got married to her, I wished to God I hadda ate her up. But I love my wife and my wife love me. Show you that I do love my wife, when I come in on home on pay-day, reach my hand down in my pocket and pull out 5, 10, 15 and 20 cents. Oh, I love my wife and my wife loves me.

Next one I got married to, she's so cross-eyed, she could stand in the middle of the week and look at two Sundays. That's a cross-eyed mama. But I love my wife, my wife loves me. Next one I got married to, 700lbs. Look like a bale of cotton with the middle band busted on it. Yeh, but I love my wife and my wife love me. Show you that I do love my wife, I bought her a wristwatch for a Christmas present. When she didn't wear it on her arm, I wore it for a belt. Every morning when I get ready to go to work, I'd hug and kiss this side and then I'd walk around to the other side, hug and kiss it. One morning, I got up and hugged and kissed this side, started round to the other side, met a man coming out from round there. Oh, yeh... strange things happening. You know what I do now when I go home? Knock on the front door, run round to the back, knock a pick handle out and draw back. You know, I ain't missed a man coming out there yet. Don't laugh over there, big boy, the same thing happen to you. Yes, yes... it's funny things happen in this world.

I never will forget when I was walking down the street, and I met up with a good-lookin' girl. I said, "Honey, you wanna go up there to a cafe and get something to eat?" She said, "To be sure, to be sure, to be sure." We went in, sat down and eat, y'know. "Honey, you mind goin' up in my room, we take a snort apiece, a little nip y'know apiece?"

She said, "To be sure, to be sure, to be sure." Yeh... I went on up the street a little piece further, y'know. I told her, "Stand here a minute. I've got to go in this drug store a minute." She said, "What you got to go in the drug-store for?" I said, "To be sure, to be sure, to be sure." Yeh, we went on up the street, I told her, "You stand here a minute. I've got to go in here and get me another little old suit of clothes, here, baby." She said, "oh, to be sure, to be sure, to be sure." I went there and bought me a little suit, y'know. It was a Jew suit. I think I paid \$4.98 for it. Sign on it said, 'If you rain on me, I'll draw up on you'. It were big enough for ten men, but the Jew held it in the back, said, "Look in that glass; ain't that a good fit?" That's a good fit." I said, "Yeh." I looked at myself y'know. I walked on out the door; didn't pay anything for it. Yeh, I got with her and said, "Now we're going to the dance." She said, "To be sure, to be sure, to be sure." And the rain was on that suit; it say if you rain on me, I'm gonna tighten up on you.

I went on, we got to the dance, y'know. For a little bit 'fore we go got there, it came up a good shower of rain, and got me real good 'n damp, y'know. And when I got there, that suit was huggin' me some kinda tight. I thought I had on a corset. When I got upstairs, the first thing she hollered.. I said, "Baby, you wanna take a dance?" She said, "To be sure, to be sure, to be sure." That thing was hittin' up 'bout my knees then, y'know. That band started playin'.. toot-te-toot-toot; I grabbed her and said, "Let's go back and live, baby". Toot-toot-te-toot, ... After a while, I heard something, 'scrunch'. I never paid much attention out there, brother. Toot-te-toot. After a while I hear something go 'scrunch, scrunch.' I looked around; you know, all the bosom was outa my pants. I told her, I said, "Lady, I had a good time with you." I was scared to turn around, y'know. I said, "I had an awful good time with you." "Oh, Mr. Jackson, Mr. Sam, I sure had a good time with you and I hope to see more of you." Yeh, I was doodling back down the steps, y'know, I said, "Yes, m'am, and I had an awful good time with you m'am." I was doodling back. "Yes, and I sure God enjoyed you and Mr. Jackson, don't forget, I hope to see more of you." I got on down the steps and said, "Now, 'scuse me lady, I've got to go". I was scared to turn

around you know, all the bosom was out of my pants. She said, "Mr. Jackson," got down the bottom of the steps, "Mr. Jackson, I hope to see more of you," I got around there, I said, "If them pants tear like they did upstairs, damned if you ain't gonna see all of me!" Funny things happen in the world.

After them few remarks, I'm indelegated to sing you a song. I never will forget, when that judge 'rested - when that policeman 'rested a teenage girl. Oh, she was about 18; full grown woman. She had on one of them little mini-skirts, you know, stickin' all out. And she done got half drunk, she was doing the twist on the street. Little music was playing at a Jew's store there, and the police grabbed her. "Come on. This's disorderly conduct out here, you out here doin' the twist on the street." Her arms was goin' that way, y'know and her body was goin' the other. Twist. Carried her and locked her up. Judge tried 2 or 3, cried, "Next defendand." Mr. Policeman, "Judge, Honour, this lady here for disorderly conduct." "Disorderly conduct!" He's 80 years old, never seen the twist in his life. He say, "What you got her for?" Judge asked him, looking over his eye-glasses. Said, "We got her for doin' the twist on the street here." "Twist?" She was standing there, y'know, beautiful thing, I fell in love with her. I was in the courthouse, y'know, see how they try 'em. The judge says, "Young lady, would you come out there and describe how you do that twist." She got out there, y'know, reared back and done the twist and winked her eye at the judge. He said, "Go on home sugar." Police said, "You mean to tell me you ain't gonna fine her?" He said, "Hell, yes! Just as soon as court's over, I'll find her!" Funny things in this world. I don't blame him a lick. I could've wound her myself. But he had more money than me, y'know... Oh, yeh, I had 'em all day yesterday and thank God I got 'em again today!

Our Father, which art in Heaven,
Hallowed by thy name,
Thy kingdom come, gimme a drink o' that rum,¹⁸
High low Jack in the game,
Hand me down...

I went to kiss my gal the other night,
I went to kiss her sneakin',
I missed her mouth and caught her nose,
And the gosh-durned thing was leakin',
Hand me down...

Now if you want to get to Heaven, let me tell you what to do,
Grease your foot with some mutton stew,
That devil get at you with his greasy hand,
You can slip right over into the promised land,¹⁹
Hand me down...

Carried my gal to a barbershop,
To have her mouth cut small,
She closed her eyes and opened her mouth,
She swallowed the shop 'n all,
Hand me down...

Now two little imps, looked like tar,²⁰
Tried to steal away to Heaven on an electric car,
Car wheel slipped back down the hill,
'Stead of goin' to Heaven they went to Jacksonville,
Hand me down...

My old Missus promised me,
"Son, when I die, I'm going to set you free,"²¹
Lived so long her head got bald,
God, she got out of the notion of dyng at all,
Hand me down...

¹⁴The Chief shrewdly draws the analogy between the folk manufacture of his soap while he is showing how it works. Like all his medicines, there were many people present who had bought from him on previous occasions and they were only too glad to buy more.

¹⁵There may be some connection between this boast of removing the 'dirt, the grease, the grime, the filth and the corruption', which is never altered as a spoken motif, and the line spoken by the doctor in English Mummings' Plays - "I can cure the hitch, the stitch, the palsy and the gout." Alan Brody, The English Mummings and Their Plays (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969), p.55. After all, the medicine show leader is a bogus doctor, as he often is in the Mummings' Play.

¹⁶Having told people there were three for \$1, and then making the packet up to 6, the Chief had earlier filled each packet with 6 bars, ready for sale.

¹⁷Sam frequently offers these toasts and makes a personal ritual of saying one whenever he eats. He is always careful of his audience and his company determines which toasts he will tell. He has told very bawdy and hilarious ones but only in male company that he knows well, and when he was sure he was not being taped.

¹⁸Much of Sam's joke material is profane - as opposed to sacred - and a streak of anti-church satire is common in Negro folklore. Quoted by George Brown Tindall, The Emergence of the New South 1913-1945. Vol. X of A History of the South, ed. Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter. 10 vols. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), p.566, a Negro preacher in 1941 stated that "we are the policemen of the Negroes. If we did not keep down their ambitions and divert them into religion, there would be upheaval in the South." If that is true, . and there is more than a germ of truth in it, there is little wonder that such satire is common and well received.

¹⁹A very similar version was collected from an "itinerant black minstrel" in Louisberg, N. C. in 1915-16 as

If you want to go to Heaven,
I'll tell you what to do;
I'll grease you all over in Brunswick stew;
The devil will grab at you and miss his man,

Then you slip right over into the promised land. Newman I. White, American Negro Folk Songs (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1928), p.135. A similar stanza occurs in the Original Talking Blues of the white, South Carolina performer, Chris Bouchillon, although the song is probably of black origin, as there are references in two places to 'white folks'. Bouchillon, who may have been a medicine show performer himself, recorded Born in Hard Luck backed by The Medicine Show on Columbia 15151-D. (see Footnote 23).

²⁰The motif here is probably related to the well known Tar-Baby, a figure common in the black folklore of the east coast states.

²¹The reference here is very plainly to the setting free of a slave and thus dates from pre-Emancipation days. Many slave-owners permitted their slaves freedom upon the owner's death. Thus, this stanza is probably over 100 years old.

Sam. Yeh, 'n we had a party that night. Great God! Next mornin' pa says, "Son, let's go to church." I told him I didn't care if I didn't. He said, "Put on your little Sunday go-to-meeting Jew's suit. I put on that suit; it had a sign on it. It say, 'If you rain on me, I'll draw up on you.'" I put't on, y'know. Pa said, "Hook up old Seymour." I hooked up old Seymour. He said, "You drive." I grabbed old Seymour, y'know. Pa said, "Hold him now" and hit him down across the back-bone three times, before he let him go. I drawed back... a-whow, a-wow, a-wow. Down the road, me, 'n pa and Seymour. Me, 'n Seymour 'n pa. Down the road we went. Yeh, now, when we got to the church, old Seymour got scared of something a little afore he got to the church; he must've seen his shadow. He didn't know he looked that bad, y'know, there weren't nothing but a frame there. He jumped, jumped the lines out of my hand. Pa said, "Son, he's gone, ain't he?" I said, "Yeh!" I said, "Pa, what're we gonna do now?" Seymour got to the church; he hit that big oak tree and stopped but me and pa didn't. Me and pa was in the air, side by each and each by side. After a while, pa got down under me... I got down under pa. Pa hollered down and said "Hey, son." I said, "Yessir, pa". You reckon the good Lord's with us?" I said, "If he is, he's a goin' son-uv-er-gun." After a while, me and pa come down. Pa said, "Lord, we had a glorious time in Heaven, didn't we?" I said, "Yeh, but I'm glad to get back on earth!".

He said, "Leg's go into church now." Pa went into church and went into Amen Corner. Preacher took his text and come in preaching; pa was dreaming about Seymour running away. Every morning when he's taking a nap, he jumps. Preacher, "Ooh, I can see more..." Pa asleep, y'know, but he was dreamin' about Seymour runnin' away. After a while, a big fat woman jumped up and shouted around there, y'know, shouted all 'round pa. Pa was sleeping right on and dreaming. Dreaming about old Seymour running away. And that old lady shouting around there and when she got round there where pa was, pa reached up and caught her around the waist, said, "Hey, son", he was asleep right on mind you, y'know. I said "Yessir, pa." "Cut loose the hand-strings, cut loose the back? , pull the bridle off, let her rear, I got him!

Yeh, after them few remarks, I'm indeligated to sing you a song. I'll sing it in 5 different voices, miserable, terrible, horrible, norrible and excitable. Now as I sing this song, if any teenage girls out there got on them little old mini-skirts, I want them to rock to the right, any schoolteachers out there, I want them to kinda rock it to the left, if any old maid out there can't rock either way, just do this [swings hips forward suggestively] , I'll see them.

Who's that left here a while ago?
Lord, when I come in my house,
Who's that cat went out of my back door. 22

Oh, he left my back door runnin',
I thought he was a garbage can,
One leg in his britches and holding the other one in his hand,
Lord... refrain.

Hey, he must have been a stranger,
Never been here before,
Broke down my bed and had a pallet on my floor,
Who's that left here a while ago,
Lord, if he sink down easy, let him cut that caper around here once more,

What'd the tadpole say, when he swallowed up a eel?
The more you wiggle, son, the better I feel.
The monkey told the elephant, "I bet a dime,
Can't twist your tail like you see me twistin' mine",
Who's... refrain...

Oh, he left my back door runnin',
Catchin' plenty fresh air,
Seen the bottom of his feet so reg'lar,
I thought he was kneeling in prayer,
Lord... refrain...

Hey, you look at me, you look at a man that was born for hard luck. ²³

I was born on the thirteenth day, and that was on a Friday.
I was born on a bad luck day.
I was born on the last month in the year;
I was born on the last week in the month;
I was born on the last day in the week;
I was born on the last hour in the day;
I was born on the last minute in the hour;
I was born on the last second in the minute;
I was born on the last half a degree of the second of the minute.
I was born - I come darned near not gettin' here at all.

To show you that I is in hard luck,
If I go up the street walking fast, I run over something.
I'm in such hard luck, if I go up there walking slow, something run over me.
I'm in such hard luck, if I'm sitting down, I'm in everybody's way.
I'm in such hard luck, if it's raining down soup at this very minute -
old man you ought to be quiet - if it's raining down soup at this very
minute, everybody'd be standing there with a spoon, I'd have a fork.
I'm in such hard luck, if my daddy was to die, they'd make a mistake
and bury me. I'm in such hard luck, if I was to die, I'd have to walk
to the cemetery. Oh, I was born for hard luck.

No longer'n day behind past yesterday before this day got ready to stop
by here, I was standing on the corner, y'know, I was on my feet.
Two ways to be on your feet... mine, the leather done come off the
bottom of mine, and I was on my feet. I was leaning up against a post,
I was in hard luck anyhow, and I looked up the street and I saw a great
big old policeman, looked like he weighed about 350. He was wagglin'
down the street with them two guns on the side, spinnin' that headache
stick in his hand, on his finger. When he got down next to me, I stepped
out there. I said, "Mr. Policeman." He said, "Yes. What is it?"
I said, "Can you tell me what time it is, sir?" He drug out that headache
stick, look like it take him a half hour to get it out, it was so long, hit me
down across the head - Kasokit! Said, "Son, it just struck one." I said,
'Ooh, I'm glad I wasn't here an hour ago, I'd have got the whole dose!"
Made me so mad I could eat fried chicken.

I left there and went on down the street a little piece further, I was in
hard luck anyhow, y'know, and I seen a whole lot of people gathered up.
I went on there and stuck my nose over there - I was tending to everybody
else's business and leaving mine alone - I was in hard luck anyhow, and
a man was turnin' a handle and a little old monkey with a red suit on was
jumpin' all around there... dit-dit-dit - music coming out and people
pitchin' him nickels and dimes. I walked on through the crowd and pushed
over there and went up and stood up aside the man. His shoulders was up
higher than I was. I looked up at him and he looked down on me. "Shorty,
do you mind holdin' my monkey while I go eat?" I told him I didn't care
if I didn't.

I felt big, y'know, I was turning that handle, that music coming out, and that
monkey had on that little red suit, jumpin' all around. People pitchin' him
nickels and dimes. Oh, the monkey didn't have no pockets, now y'know.
I was gettin' off my feet fast. - Yes. After a while, a lady was standing
there, she gave her little girl a nickle. She said, "Go give the monkey a
nickle." She come over there, She looked at me, then she looked at the

monkey, then looked back at me and looked back at her ma and said, "Mama". She said, "Yes, honey, what is it?" "Who must I give this nickle to, the monkey or the monkey's pa?" Yeh, made me so mad I could eat fried chicken.

I left there and went on down to the depot, you know, I believe I leave town. I had a little abcess²⁴ on my pocket, y'know. The man's gone and the monkey didn't have no pockets. So, so I went on down there and I run in the depot, y'know, and I slapped a dime on the counter. I said, "Give me a ticket." He said, "Where to?" I said, "There you go, meddlin' again. Just give me a ticket!" And he did. I was in hard luck, anyhow, went on and got the train. Time I got on the train good, sat down and crossed my legs, in walked that same little monkey, that same little monkey-man had him and sat him on my lap. Said, "Hold my monkey." I said, "Mister, take this monkey outa my lap. You ain't up yonder now." (Sassy, y'know, I had a little nut²⁴ in my pocket), yes. He said, "Oh, that's a good little monkey, he ain'ta goin' to hurt you." I said, "Take this monkey outa my lap, I tell you." He said, "Oh, that's a good little monkey. He ain'ta goin' to hurt you." I jumped up and went runnin' in to the conductor, I said, "Conductor!" He said, "Yes, what is it?" I said, "You allow monkeys on this train?" He said, "Ssh! Shut up and ride on - they won't know you're on here." I was born for hard luck. Yeh, hard luck stays on my trail. It made me so mad I could eat fried chicken.

I got down off of that train, on my way back up town. Time I got uptown good, yonder come a trolley-car. There stand a poodle-dog on the tracks, and yonder come a mahogany brown, look like she weighed about 500 lbs. She was trying to get that poodle-dog off the tracks before that trolley-car hit him, but she didn't make it. That trolley-car hit him, and knocked him in the air. When he hit the ground - she had on one of them little mini-skirts - she fell down on him. Three men behind me fell dead! And I stood up there and cold chills run all over me. And she was rubbin' that poodle-dog all, 'n cryin' y'know. After a while she hauled way back and kissed that poodle-dog smack in the mouth, Kapow! I said, "Ooh, oh." She said, "What's the matter, mister?" I said, "I wished I was a dog." She said, "Never mind, puppy, you'll grow." Yeh, it made me so mad I could eat fried chicken. I was mindin(?) around there a little while, y'know, I done fell in love with her sure enough. She was cryin' y'know, and tears leakin' out... after a while, she looked up at me and said, "Mister." I said, "Yes, m'am." She said, "D'you mind taking this dime, going up to the grocery store and gittin' me 10 cents worth of dog meat?" I told her I didn't care if I didn't. I grabbed the dime outa her hand, you could shoot dice on my coat-tails, goin' up the street, to get me back where that mahogany brown was. Well I run into the grocery store and when I slapped the dime on that counter my coat-tails flew up over my head. "Give me 10 cents worth of dog meat." The man looked at me one moment, said, "You want it wrapped up or are you goin' to eat it here?" Yes, I was born for hard luck. After them few remarks, I'm indeligated to sing you a song. The title of it is, never smack the baby in the face, 'cause the Good Lord have prepared a much better place. ²⁵

I've been jawin' along time... my time is up now. Got to go from here to the Great Beyond.

Oh, Lordy, morning, I start to walkin' [blows through nose]
I met a woman, I start to talkin',
Took her with me, thought maybe we could git a... julep,
Thank God, a mint julep...

Nine months time, boy we had a baby,
Had a baby, God I don't mean maybe,
?? crawlin' all around me,
[Blows through nose as man calls out, "Do it, Sam!"] ...
Thank God, a mint julep... oh, yeh, a mint julep...

One mint julep, man, was the causin' of it all,
Thank God a mint julep...

Oh, yeh. Hey, Chief. This is my old friend down there, God, come on up here. I hate 'cause this thing out of fix, where they can't hear you [the loud speakers had broken down that night and the microphone wasn't working] but .. that's my old friend. Don't worry, I'm gonna dance.

Chief. Sam, I want you to dance for these folks in just a few minutes. Sam starts to dance . No, not right now!

Sam. Oh, I thought you told me to hit it then! I reckon this is as high up as I'll ever get. [He is standing on their platform] . Maybe the good Lord will spare me an old pair of wings Gabriel wore a little while, y'know. I ain't never wore nothin' new. Yeh, them britches I wore, them britches I wore, y'know, way back yonder when the time was tough, when the wind blowin', you could hear them whistlin'. So many patches' on them, my God, I never did have to change clothes, 'cause the pants I wore, when mamma got through patchin' them, I had on a different pair. How you get so many clothes, brother? Yeh, a preacher asked me that in church, one time. [Sam begins to dance] . I don't do this for my livin', now; I do it just to keep from missin' so many doggone meals. My mamma, she was an Indian, my papa was an engineer. I don't know what I is, a box-car or a papoose. All I know, I'm sufferin'. Lord, Lord, come and get that blue-eyed baby, 'cause he's burnin' down. I asked my dear old mother, one time, I said, Mama." She said, "What it is, you little old blue-eyed thing, you?" I said, "How come I ain't got no sisters and no brothers?" My mama patted me on the head, said, "Listen here, honey,
Listen here my honey dear,
As lazy as your pappy was,
Hell, it's just through luck you're here "

Yessir . . . I never will forget, my mama told me, she said, "Son." I said, "Yes, m'am, mom." She said, "I got an old Domonicle(?) hen down there in that coop. I've been fattening it up for three weeks. I want you to wring her head off today. Son, I'm gwine make dumplins." I said, "Moma. . ." Moma cook dumplins so good, mouth smack a week after you eat 'em. Here's how I went. . . y'know the way I went down to that coop. . . ? I looked down on that old Domonicle(?) hen. I said, "You make a good pet, but, God knows, them dumplins taste the best to me." I reached down there and got her by the head, give it four or five swings, headed back the other way, I hear her when she hollered. . . crack. I threwed her out there in the clean yard. I said, "There she is, moma." I want some dumplins so bad, my mouth both sides were runnin' juice. Here's the way that old Dominicle(?) was floppin' when she's slowly dyin'. . . you know the way she was floppin'? [Imitates wing beats of dying hen, by dancing] That's her last dyin' flop! Hey, Chief! I'm the boss around here. I'm the boss around here.

Chief. What'd you say, Sam?

Sam. I said, here come the boss around here!

Chief. Now ladies and gentlemen, this's going to be our last demonstration tonight. If you need any of this snake oil, here, we have a few bottles left here. \$1 a bottle. If you need any soap, we still have some soap left here. Soap is for your hair, your skin, your scalp, for shaving your beard. Stops dandruff, stops an itchy scalp. Six bars for \$1. And if you need any of our corn medicine, we still have some left. Now if you need any of our products, Sam will be here to wait upon you. He'll step down and be glad to wait upon you. We're gonna close up now; this is our last demonstration. We will be here all day tomorrow, we'll be here all day tomorrow. Tell your friends and neighbours to come back and see us tomorrow. I want to thank you for your kind and generous attention, ladies and gentlemen, . . .

²²This is the same song as Washboard Sam's Back Door on Bluebird 7001, recorded May 4, 1937, and Peg Leg Sam uses some of the original lines. The lines in stanza 3, again with the monkey motif, seem to have drifted in from another song.

²³It would be interesting to trace the original of this song. On phonograph record, white South Carolinian, Chris Bouchillon, made a 'hit' with a talking blues:

'According to one story, the recording executive liked the way Bouchillon talked but not the way he sang, so he made Bouchillon recite to a rhythmic guitar backing, but without any definite rhyming or verse pattern. The result was 'Born in Hard Luck' (on Columbia 15151-D).' Charles W. Joyner, Folk Song in South Carolina (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press), p. 97.

However, Bouchillon's other songs suggest that he acquired his lyrics from other sources, and he may have been aware of the medicine show circuit, as the reverse of Born in Hard Luck was The Medicine Show. In 1954, medicine show performer, Frank Floyd recorded The Great Medical Menagerist for the Sun label in Memphis, including lines with a spoken delivery and fine rhythmic guitar, reminiscent of Bouchillon. The lines frequently floated into blues and perhaps the best-known of these is Bad Luck by Louisiana bluesman, Lightnin' Slim, recorded in Crowley, Louisiana in 1954.

²⁴Both references here refer to the money he had picked up from the monkey.

²⁵Notice here the element of anti-Negro humour. The policeman, conductor and storekeeper are white men, each ridiculing the black. Sam reflects the passive recipient in his story, not the active resister that Abrahams' (see footnote 1) Philadelphia ghetto blacks see in such characters as Shine. Again, there is insufficient space to consider the role of the Negro in Sam's brand of humour but it differs markedly from that collected in urban areas, and certainly deserves far closer attention.



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