Notes and Queries

[The editors will welcome as contributions to this section of the *California Folklore Quarterly* either small items of traditional materials or inquiries designed to elicit information about such materials. In general, discussion of the materials offered here will be brief. Records of facts likely to be lost or overlooked, and inquiries which our readers may be able to answer—such items will be the typical ones.]

On the Wobbly "Casey Jones" and Other Songs.—The Nevada version of "Casey Jones, Union Scab" contributed to the "Notes and Queries" section by Duncan Emrich (I, 292–293) cannot without qualification be regarded as a folk song since it is of known authorship and has enjoyed only a short traditional life. The song, however, is of value in providing evidence of the action of oral tradition over a strictly limited period of time and in drawing attention to other songs of like provenience.

Its original appearance in print was in the numerous editions of a pamphlet whose scarlet cover carried the title *I.W.W. Songs* and whose title page described its contents more generally as *Songs of the Workers On the Road, In the Jungles and In the Shops.* There it stands as "Casey Jones—The Union Scab. By Joe Hill."[1] Since pamphlets are perishable, the original text is offered here for comparison with the traditional version.

The workers on the S.P. line to strike sent out a call;
But Casey Jones, the engineer, he wouldn't strike at all;
His boiler it was leaking, and its drivers on the bum,
And his engine and its bearings, they were all out of plumb.

CHORUS

Casey Jones kept his junk pile running;
Casey Jones was working double time;
Casey Jones got a wooden medal,
For being good and faithful on the S.P. line.

The workers said to Casey: "Won't you help us win this strike?"
But Casey said: "Let me alone, you'd better take a hike."
Then someone put a bunch of railroad ties across the track
And Casey hit the river with an awful crack.

[1] (9th ed.; Cleveland, 1916), p. 32. The pamphlet was in its 24th edition in 1929. The song was later printed, with few changes, in *Songs of the People* (New York, 1937), p. 12.

Casey Jones hit the river bottom;
Casey Jones broke his blooming spine,
Casey Jones was an Angelino,
He took a trip to heaven on the S. P. line.

When Casey Jones got up to heaven to the Pearly Gate,
He said: "I'm Casey Jones, the guy that pulled the S.P. freight."
"You're just the man," said Peter; "our musicians went on strike;
You can get a job a-scabbing any time you like."

Casey Jones got a job in heaven;
Casey Jones was doing mighty fine;
Casey Jones went scabbing on the angels,
Just like he did the workers on the S.P. line.

The angels got together, and they said it wasn't fair,
For Casey Jones to go around a-scabbing everywhere.
The angels' Union No. 23, they sure was there,
And they promptly fired Casey down the Golden Stair.

Casey Jones went to Hell a-flying.
"Casey Jones," the Devil said, "Oh, fine;
Casey Jones, get busy shoveling sulphur;
That's what you get for scabbing on the S.P. line."

In its short traditional life of roughly thirty years[2] the widely distributed printed text may have helped to inhibit extensive verbal change. Whatever the cause, the variation in word and phrase is small;[3] the principal difference between the two texts is in what might be called the dramatic structure of the piece. The original version consists of two acts; oral tradition has telescoped the two, omitting Hill's proletarian vision of judgment.

Joe Hill, properly Hillstrom, and the Industrial Workers with whom he was identified have left a small but distinct trace in several outlying territories of American folk song. Hill, whose work can be considered typical of the original production of the group, is responsible for nineteen of the fifty-eight songs in the 1916 pamphlet, and several of these

[2] Ralph Chaplin, *New Masses,* IV, 8 (January, 1929), p. 14, speaks of the song as "written during the big S.P. strike." No "big" strike appears in newspaper or company records during the period 1905 to 1914—the obvious limiting dates of the formation of the I.W.W. and of Hill's final arrest in Utah. In 1911, however, there was a shopmen's strike in northern California which was marked by some violence. This may have been the occasion for the song.

For a railroad song which sprang more ingenuously from a strike—the Pullman affair of 1894—see R. W. Gordon, "Old Songs that Men Have Sung," *Adventure,* LXI, 6 (March 1, 1927), p. 205.

[3] The most striking variant, *a-scabbing* > *in his cabin,* is interesting because the word occurs unchanged elsewhere in the traditional version.

have enjoyed a limited traditional life. "The Preacher and the Slave," probably the best known of his songs, "Scissorbill," and "Casey Jones, Union Scab" adequately illustrate Hill's tough, satiric vein.[4] His method, and that of the organization generally, was to set an incendiary text to an almost universally known tune. The pamphlet was even advertised as consisting of "parodies on well known popular airs," and when Hill in one instance was responsible for both tune and text the fact is specifically noted.[5] Only rarely do the tunes have any connection with folk song, and in those few cases the choice probably had nothing to do with their existence in folk song. The use of "Casey Jones," for example, is undoubtedly due to the vaudeville popularity of the Newton and Seibert version rather than to any feeling for the song as folk stuff.[6]

In addition to providing original texts, the I.W.W. appropriated and popularized songs of unknown authorship and indefinite history. "Hallelujah, I'm a Bum" came to be closely identified with the Industrial Workers. In the *New York Times* (Sept. 20, 1915, 6:3) it is attributed to Joe Hill and described as "the marching song of the church-raiding army of the unemployed in New York in the Winter of 1914." George Milburn, however, quotes a statement which places its composition in 1897, eight years before the organization of the Industrial Workers, and it is probably even older.[7]

In the spring of 1942, Professor Harold Barto of Ellensburg, Washington, gave me an I.W.W. song which he learned in the logging camps of northern Idaho in 1917, and I offer it here as an example of the Industrial Workers' activity in another type of occupational song. Barto says that there are at least two stanzas missing (although the number naturally varied with the singer): one dealing with hiring out, at the beginning,

[4] For "The Preacher and the Slave" see Carl Sandburg, *The American Songbag* (New York, 1927), p. 222; the more usual shortened version appears in Nels Anderson, *The Hobo* (University of Chicago, 1923), p. 210, in George Milburn, *The Hobo's Hornbook* (New York, 1930), p. 83, and in *Songs of the People* (New York, 1937), p. 38. "Scissorbill" was used by Upton Sinclair in a play, *Singing Jailbirds*, produced at the Provincetown Theatre in New York in 1928. John Dos Passos found Joe Hill and his songs significant enough to quote from "The Preacher and the Slave" in a Newsreel and allow the man a thumbnail biography in *Nineteen-Nineteen* (New York, 1932).

[5] "Don't Take My Papa Away from Me. Words and Music by Joe Hill," p. 28. The sentimental pieces in the pamphlet have had no traditional life; fortunately neither has such turgid rhetoric as "Up from your knees, ye cringing serfmen! / What have ye gained by whines and tears?"

[6] See Louise Pound, *American Ballads and Songs* (New York, 1922), p. 250. For a song of proletarian tendency growing more naturally out of folk material see John A. and Alan Lomax, *Our Singing Country* (New York, 1941), p. 276.

[7] Milburn, *op. cit.*, p. 97. My father recalls hearing the song in Wisconsin as early as 1896.

and another, later on, which described a spree. It is sung to the tune of "A Son of a Gamboleer."

Fifty Thousand Lumberjacks[8]

1. Fifty thousand lumberjacks
   Goin' out to work,
   Fifty thousand honest men
   That never loaf or shirk,
   Fifty thousand lumberjacks
   They sweat and swear and strain,[9]
   Get nothin' but a cussin'
   From the pushes and the brains.

2. Fifty thousand lumberjacks
   Goin' in to eat
   Fifty thousand plates of slum
   Made from tainted meat,
   Fifty thousand lumberjacks
   All settin' up a yell
   To kill the bellyrobbers
   An' damn their souls to hell.

3. Fifty thousand lumberjacks
   Sleepin' in pole bunks,
   Fifty thousand odors
   From dirty socks to skunks,
   Fifty thousand lumberjacks
   Who snore and moan and groan
   While fifty million graybacks
   Are pickin' at their bones.

4. Fifty thousand lumberjacks,
   Fifty thousand packs,
   Fifty thousand dirty rolls
   Upon their dirty backs,
   Fifty thousand lumberjacks
   Strike and strike like men;
   For fifty years we packed our rolls,
   But never will again.

Berkeley, California — William Alderson

[8] Professor Arthur G. Brodeur has pointed out to me a general similarity in metrical pattern and even in phrase—"twenty-thousand Cornish men"—between "Trelawny" and this song. For "Trelawny" see *The Oxford Song Book* (Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 168.

[9] Var.: In storm and snow and rain.