

THE LEGENDARY CASEY JONES

AND OTHER AMERICAN FOLKTALES

GEOFFREY THOMAS



Reformation
Lightning

CONTENTS

American Folktales	xv
Beware of the Words, Smiles and Frowns of Men	1
Brer Fox, Brer Rabbit and the Two Failures	19
The Battle of the Braggarts	31
Jonathan Chapman, Or As He Was Better Known, Johnny Appleseed	41
How A Pedlar Learned About The Final Price Being Paid	53
The Hunted Goose	63
The Legendary Casey Jones	71
Fire, Fire, Fire!	81
The Remarkable Story of Pocahontas	91
The Robin and the Bear	101

AMERICAN FOLKTALES

This book is full of American folktales—good stories that one generation passes on to another. All richly human and soaked in the influence that the Bible has had in North America for five hundred years.

Christianity has given Americans the ideals of redeeming grace, forgiveness and new life. It has also taught them that the great aim of humanity is to glorify and enjoy the living God, to love our neighbours as ourselves, to resist temptations to hurt others and to overcome evil by doing good.

These things have saturated and structured the wonderful freedoms of the United States throughout its history to today. The Christian church has contributed psalms, hymns and the pattern of meeting together once a week. It has defined and

encouraged family life, of parents nurturing and teaching their children, telling them their stories and describing their heritage.

Folktales go back to an agricultural age, to an acquaintance with wild animals: deer, rabbits, foxes, cougars, racoons, buffalos, beavers and bears. The stories reflect the presence of Native Americans, African Americans, Latinos, Chicanos and Canadians who all have injected their own stories into the mix of the continent's folklore.

North American folktales have homespun humour by the bucketful. They are less bloodthirsty and far less cruel than many of the stories gathered in Germany by the Brothers Grimm, but European fairy tales have had a pervasive effect on the population of the United States through its millions of immigrants. They are all part of the incredible mix of the nation's folklore.

In this book you will find larger than life historical personalities, nostalgia, quaintness and cuteness, but also inspiration and encouragement to consider afresh the rich achievements of individuals who have come to acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Lord and God.

BEWARE OF THE WORDS, SMILES AND
FROWNS OF MEN

There are many people in the world who want you to put your trust in them.

“Believe what I tell you!” they cry.

“Give me your support!”

“Back me!”

“See how clever I am!”

“I’ve got it!”

“I’ve arrived!”

“Don’t you want what I’ve got?”

“Follow me and then you and I will both have a wonderful future!”

There was once a farmer who was given a fine piece of iron as payment for building a fence right around a neighbour’s farm. He was pleased with the

bargain as in his days iron was very scarce. He kept it safe while he wondered what he would buy with it.

A year or two passed and then he heard that a new blacksmith had come to the local village. So one morning he saddled his horse and rode over the hill and to the valley bottom. He forded the river standing on his stirrups on the back of his horse as it swam through the centre of the torrent. Then he rode the stallion down the bank for another mile until he came to the village and to the new smith. A curl of smoke came out of the chimney and so the farmer knew that the smith was busy. He dismounted and tied his horse to the hitching rail. He picked up the heavy piece of iron from the saddlebag and carried it into the forge.

“Good morning, neighbour!” said the blacksmith.

“Good morning, friend!” said the farmer. “How’s business?”

“Yes, I’m doing great,” said the blacksmith.

But the farmer noticed that the forge was the cleanest he had ever seen. There did not seem much evidence of work being done. Still, he spoke to the smith and said, “I need an axe. There are a number of trees that need to be cut down and I have this piece of iron. Can you make an axe head for me?”

“Of course I can,” said the blacksmith. “Come

back Tuesday afternoon and I will have it ready for you.”

“I am mighty glad to hear it,” the farmer said and shook hands with the smith and went out and untied his horse and rode out of the village and along the river bank for a mile. Then he forded the river and went up and up over the steep hill, down the other side and home another mile where he entered his log cabin and told his wife the good news.

On Tuesday afternoon, after he had eaten a dish of gumbo, the farmer saddled his horse and rode it to the hill and climbed up and up to the top in the rain and down the other side slipping and sliding until he got to the river. It was deeper than before, but his horse was strong and they forded the river together. Then down the riverside lane they went until they came to the village and the blacksmith’s shop. The farmer tethered the horse and entered the smithy.

“Hello friend,” he said, and greeted the blacksmith. “How have you got on with my axe head?”

“Oh,” the smith said. “There wasn’t enough metal to make an axe.”

“Not enough? I reckon there was plenty and some spare.”

“Not at all. The metal shrinks when you heat it white hot.”

“Oh? I’ve never heard that in all my life.”

“But I tell you what I can do,” said the smith. “I can make you a fine hammer.”

“Well, I do need a hammer,” said the disappointed farmer. “All right, do that.”

So he went out of the forge and untethered his horse and rode it out of the village, along the riverbank, across the swiftly flowing river and up the steep slippery hill, carefully down the other side, and finally the last mile home to the log cabin to tell his wife of his disappointment.

The next afternoon he set out again after he had finished another bowl of gumbo. He rode to the bottom of the hill, and along the narrow path through the trees, and up and up until he reached the crest of the hill. Then down and down they went slipping and brushing through the wet trees and bushes until they reached the river. The horse hesitated, but the farmer urged it on and across the river they went, the horse swimming for a while. Along the riverbank path they rode to the village and up to the smithy where he tethered his horse and ducked his head under the wide doorway and entered the forge.

“Hello neighbour!” he said. “How have you got on making my hammer?”

The blacksmith frowned. “What you gave me would never make a hammer. It is much too small.”

“Too small?” replied the farmer. “To me it seems plenty big enough for two hammers at least.”

“Ah, you don’t understand the work of a blacksmith. When you heat the iron up red hot it shrinks. But I can make you a fine screwdriver.”

“A screwdriver?” cried the farmer. “A screwdriver!”

“Or a small chisel,” said the blacksmith hurriedly.

“A little chisel!” cried the farmer, thinking of all the work he had done in building the fences around his neighbour’s farm.

“Take it or leave it,” said the big burly blacksmith looking down at him with unsmiling eyes.

“I’ll come back for it tomorrow afternoon,” the unhappy farmer muttered.

The farmer went out, untied the knot on the horse’s rein, mounted and made the long journey home as the sun was setting, riding alongside the river, across the swiftly flowing torrent, up the steep wet hill, sliding down the path on the other side, and along to the lights of home, where he poured out his disappointment and frustration to his sympathetic wife.

The next afternoon, after eating the gumbo that he always ate for dinner, he saddled his horse and off he went to the hill and down to the river and across the torrent and down the riverbank to the village and the smithy. He tethered his horse and went into the forge wondering what tall tale he would get today from the blacksmith.

The bearded man in his leather apron turned around and looked at him.

“Well,” said the farmer, “is my chisel ready?”

“No, there wasn’t enough iron for a chisel or a screwdriver. But I have this for you.” And he put his hand into the trough of water alongside the fire and drew out a nail which he gave to the farmer. “That was all I could get out of that piece of iron you gave me.”

“You said you would make an axe head, and now all you have given me is a nail!”

“Well that is the reality of the iron industry,” said the tall, mean-faced blacksmith. “Hot iron shrinks. Be glad you have something,” he said, before adding, “and that will be five dollars.”

The farmer laughed and laughed. He turned his back on the blacksmith and threw the nail onto the floor. He walked out of the smithy and rode home to tell his wife the sorry tale.

“But I didn’t pay that rogue a penny,” he said, ”and when I go to the market next week I will tell every farmer there about the blacksmith with all his promises, none of which he kept. Not another farmer will go to him. He won’t be a blacksmith in our area much longer. He talks the talk, but he doesn’t walk the walk.”

Don’t be hoodwinked by words, and don’t be bought by people’s smiles. Do you know that the Lord Jesus Christ never once hoodwinked people with his words. When he told people about the way, the truth and the life he made it obvious that he was talking about himself. When he told people what it meant to have eternal life, he told them they got it by believing in him. When he told them how to have rest, it was through coming to him. And every word he spoke was true.

“You believe in God,” he said, “then also believe in me.”

He told people he was going to die but that he would rise from the dead. He did die on a cross, but on the third day, just as he had said, he rose from the dead and spent forty days talking, walking, eating

and drinking with others until he returned to heaven.

He never lies.

He never hoodwinks.

Let me tell you another story. There was once a gentleman who never spoke to any individual or a crowd of people without a wide smile. He had a mesmerising effect on people and everyone he spoke to would smile back at him and nod their heads at what he said.

He discovered the power of his grin when he was a teenager. He smiled at the bullies in the school and they didn't punch him—even though they wanted to. He smiled at all the girls and they went out with him. He smiled at any teacher when he did not bring his work to school on time. He smiled at the cows in the field when he opened the gate and they all walked to the barn without needing a dog to snap at their heels. He smiled at the sheep when he needed them to move from the High Meadow to the Oak Tree Meadow and no sheep dogs were needed to bring in the stragglers. He simply smiled and they obeyed.

He found that the way to get his own way was by