

The Railroad Cricket

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Just offhanded you might think that us human beings is the only things that sing. But I doubt this. You got words and you know what they mean when you hear somebody sing them but when you hear somebody a singing in a foreign language, say, and you cant tell what the words means, they are just sounds of so much noise. Why I remember one certain old cricket back wehre I come from that use to sing me off to sleep of a night and then wake me up right early next mroning and get me off to work and after he'd took care of me he'd throw his rear end out of gear and throw his voice in another direction and wake up somebody else. He got 2/3 of the folks down in that strip of the country off to a good days work and what's more he sung while you worked. The rain y weather he'd hide up under a chunk somewheres and you talk about it, he'd mentally put it out. Warm days in the early spring you could hear him out trapsing around under the leaves of the new green things and he sung his prettiest but not his loudest, and this was awful good to work by as everybody along the railroad use to admit. But now in the right hot summer time he sung his very loudest 'cause it was warm enough to sleep outside and he wasn't afraid of his boss. If his boss didn't like his singing he could always hang onto a rotten tie and get hauled off over to some farmers house and watch him split the tie up into wood and get carried in close up behind the cookstove and sing while the farmer's kids popped corn, and his wife made flour gravy and the neighbors come over to setup till midnight quoting the scriptures and cussing the banker. He sung for six funerals. Winter times was confining and dreary but he was cut out for singing and he liked his work. When he got cold he got serious and he sung a song to all of the other crickets. And they heard him and some of them got up the nerve to sing back and others wasn't afraid but just kept hid and kept real still, and there was some cowards that crawled away off into big holes all by their self and was afraid to come out and listen to his song even. They'd find something to eat and

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a place to stay and think they ought to keep quiet about it or some other cricket would crawl over and want to eat and maybe even go to singing and making all sorts of noise. He heard the tales and cusswords of the section gangs and he sung off a prophecy about the big railroads. He longed to go and see the other ends of the line but the porter sprayed the coaches so much that he couldn't ride, it got in his throat and he couldn't sing, and in his eyes and he couldn't see — so he stayed pretty close around there where he was born and just sung like I told you to get you woke up and to put you to work, and when the train whistled by.

Woody Guthrie Jan. '30, 1941 Columbia, Calif.