

*a
pap
we
couldn't
manage*

Pap was what our school teacher called a Stoic. Six feet tall and strong as a horse, he never seemed hungry or thirsty, but was always a big eater and on a hot day could drink almost a gallon of water. He had no special taste for good food and always ate what was placed before him without a word. He never noticed the difference between a big Sunday dinner and a snack!

I never heard him brag about his family, but he never complained either. He was the cock of the walk and everybody knuckled down to him, even in little things that didn't amount to much. But he hardly ever cuffed any of us and he whipped us only for something serious.

He would work fourteen hours a day without complaining that he was tired. Yet he had a funny notion that he had something seriously wrong with him and might collapse at any time. He had a habit of feeling his own pulse, counting the beats and acting as if he expected his heart to stop then and there. As a result, he was taken in by every patent medicine advertisement he read.

Jayne's Almanack was one of his main standbys, for it was filled with remedies. In it he frequently found lots of symptoms that exactly fitted his case. He bought patent medicines by the barrel and they all helped him. Once he heard of a "Rubbing Doctor" who cured without any medicine, and he drove seventy-five miles for treatments. The doctor helped him, of course, and his rheumatism was better for several days after he got home. He would try almost anything in the shape of medicine if somebody recommended it to him.

But his main standby was National Kidney and Liver Cure put up in quart bottles. It sold for a dollar a bottle, six for five dollars. For two or three years he never took anything else. It had a tin lid, with tinfoil wrapped all around the neck, and the whole thing was covered with some kind of straw wrapping. He had to cut two

wires and use a special kind of opener to get into it. It was mighty near as good as cider to take, and, with what we sipped of it on the sly, Pap used up two bottles a week. We used to cart the empty bottles off to the creek when a freshet came along and float them down with the muddy water. We called the ceremony the "National Departure."

Pap would take a sudden notion that butter hurt him and not eat a bite of it for a year. Then he would decide that it was meat and for a considerable spell he wouldn't eat any kind of meat. Next he would settle on sugar, and let the sugar bowl go right by him at the table, just like it was poison. It was first one thing and then another. He always claimed that he didn't miss any of these foods a bit.

He never once suspected coffee hurt him and drank it three times a day, every day in the year. I used to like to watch Pap drink coffee. He always poured it out into his saucer to cool, and then drank it from the edge of the saucer. If it wasn't quite cool enough, he would blow his breath over it until it was. Nearly everybody used to do that, even women.

Then the mustache cup was invented and mother got Pap one for Christmas. Up to that time the men folks drank their coffee through their mustaches, and it was quite a problem. After every drink they had to blow or suck on their mustache to get the worst of it off, and they had to wipe it with a handkerchief before they could go on eating. Napkins hadn't showed up yet, to any extent.

But the mustache cup improved coffee drinking a whole lot. About a third of the cup was covered over to hold the mustache back, and a mouth-shaped opening at the edge let the coffee come through. It was a great success right from the start, and every farmer around there who could afford it soon had one. There was only one drawback to it. Some of the mustache cup users got pretty badly scorched before they got the hang of the thing. Joe Mussack burned a big blister on his upper lip the first time he tried his, and tossed it into the wood box and broke it all to smithereens. But as a general rule they worked fine.

Pap had very little education, as far as schooling goes. The frontier settlement in western Illinois, where his parents settled when they came from Kentucky, didn't have any schools like we have today. Once in a while some person who could read and write would start a private school for a short time in the winter time, but Pap's folks never did take much stock in that. His own daughter, when she was sixteen years old, taught him to read, but he always whispered out loud everything he read and ran his finger along under the words. He had to spell out all but the little words. When he came to a really big word, he just passed it up and went on. The Bible and *Jayne's Almanack* were his basic reading materials and hard as it was for him, he read the Bible through three times from cover to cover, spelling out pretty nearly all of it.

When Pap was reading that was all that was going on about the house, too. And when I say all, I mean all. The least little movement or noise disturbed him

bad, and he was liable to lose his line. We soon learned to be quiet as mice when Pap was spelling out his Bible.

It was the same whenever he chanced to lie down on the lounge for a noonday nap. You could have heard a pin drop, not because he ordered it that way, but because he was boss around the place, and all his whims had to be respected to the limit. He had a will of iron and never would stand any kind of contradiction from young or old. He was a regular Andy Jackson, I imagine. Once when somebody told him he was wrong about something, he got red in the face and replied, "I don't pretend to be wrong about nothing."

But he had his good points as well. He was a pioneer in many ways. He bought the first reed organ in our neighborhood and our house soon became a meeting place for youngsters who wanted to sing with that organ. Pap loved to sing and had his own favorites.

He knew some of the funniest songs anybody ever heard. I wish you could have heard him sing "The Beautiful Boy." It was a fool song that had to be acted out to get the flavor — funny faces and curious postures — and Pap could do it just right, little as you might think it. It was big fun for him to sing that song to children, and nervous grownups for that matter, because when they got all wrapped up in the performance, without knowing it they would commence making the same kind of faces and grimaces he did. It was better than a picture show and fifty years ahead of it.

How I would like to find all the words of his favorite songs, "Pompey Smash." It was a wonderful song about

a powerful colored hunter named Pompey Smash who told about his adventures and how he came to know everything and everybody.

The world is made of mud and the Massysissippi ribber,
The sun's a ball of foxfire as you may diskibber.

Tell you bout a hunt that I had with Davy Crockett,
Half hoss, half coon and half sky rocket."

Pompey Smash seems to have thought a heap of the great backwoodsman, Crockett, or else he just lauded Crockett so it would seem more important to know him.

Says I, where's your gun? Says he, I ain't none,
Says I, how kin you ketch a coon unless ye got one?

Never do you mind, Sir, but come along with Davy,
Mighty soon show you how to grin a coon crazy.

After trailing the great Davy through the woods jabbering all the time of his hunting exploits,

He stopped right still and begin fer me to feel,
Says he, Pompey Smash, let me brace again yer heel.

I stuck back my heel fer to brace up the sinner,
I see Davy Crockett grin hard fer his dinner.

But the critter kept a eatin' and didn't seem to mind it,
Never stopped a chawin' and never looked behind it.

At last Davy said, It shorely must be dead,
Fer I seed the bark fly all about the critter's head.*

* This is a version of the "Ballad of Davy Crockett" which by the mid-nineteenth century had become a favorite Negro minstrel and appeared in almost every theatre in the Midwest.

After more big talk between the two great hunters, they discovered that it was not a coon at all, but just a pine knot on a big stick, and Davy had actually grinned all the bark off of it. It was a wonderful song for a youngster. I don't know how many verses it had, but there must have been forty. We were always sorry when the end came.

Pap was a great story teller too. He didn't know many stories, but the ones he did tell were whoppers. We liked to hear him tell about hunting jayhaws. Not the Jayhawkers of today's stories, but just jayhaws — whatever they were.

Pap had a Kentucky squirrel rifle he named Old Dalsey. When he was telling his jayhawk stories he would go through all the motions of loading the gun with powder, patching and ball and then ram the ball down the barrel. Then he would fish a cap from a pocket and carefully put it on the tube. When he got to the place to shoot he would pretend to lift Old Dalsey up to place her over the limb of a tree. He said jayhawks could be found only on the darkest of nights and then only in the tops of the tallest trees. How we ate up that story when he came walking in with two dozen jayhawks tucked in his vest pocket!

Then he used to tell one about going bat-fowlin'. I can remember every word of that one to this day. His story ran like this:

An old man and old woman went bat-fowlin', one on one side the fence and one on one side. Did you ever hear it?

We would answer *no*, that we had never heard it. Then he would solemnly repeat:

An old man and old woman went bat-fowlin', one on one side the fence and one on one side. Did you ever hear it?

Then all together we would protest that we had never heard it. "Well, well, well," he would say and then maybe get his tobacco pouch out and carefully light his pipe, puff a few times wasting time while we were just bustin to get the end of the story. Then Pap would start all over again:

An old man and old woman went bat fowlin', one on one side the fence and one on one side, are you sure you never heard it?

By this time some of the boys would begin to suspect something and begin to snicker a little. They would look at each other and giggle, finally catching on that all there ever was to the story was that an old man and woman went bat-fowlin' one on one side of the fence and one on *one* side. Then the first time a new bunch of kids came to our house to play he would get them all mixed up and excited with the same story. But in course of time it became known to everybody and just naturally died out, for there weren't enough children in the whole township to keep it going on forever.

Pap was wonderful in amusing little children. He liked them all, bounced them on his knees, sang to them and got a lot of pleasure out of their company. But when his own children got big enough to begin working

about the place he seemed to back off, and quit noticing them altogether and became boss.

He was a hard boss who seemed to delight in keeping us busy with hard work. But on a farm there was always work to do and he kept us busy without making any work for us. He never liked his boys to go out sparking girls Sunday nights because it made them sleepy next day and they couldn't get their work done. He always made his own girls send their company home early in the evening for the same reason. We almost hated him for this at times, and I do not like to think of it now. It was so useless for him to act that way.

But Pap was a wonderful man, too, as I found out after I was married and had moved away from home. During the whole period of my years at Old Orchard Farm, however, I never saw him except as a big, stubborn boss. And it was that way with my older brothers as well. Joe and Frank always called him "Bonco," but they never let him hear them. I never learned what that word meant, but I sensed it was very uncomplimentary.

One time when I was visiting the boys as they were plowing corn, Joe sent Frank to the house for a fresh jug of water. When he returned Joe asked, "Where is Bonco?"

"Settin' there in the shade, suckin' his old pipe and tryin' to read," was the unsympathetic answer. But it was Pap's fault, for he never could understand youngsters and we never could understand him.

He started to whip me once when I was sixteen

years old. I was about full grown and he ought to have known better than try to humiliate me in that fashion. Up to this time I had been docile, obeying his orders and respecting his wishes, but now I was beginning to feel my oats. We were out in the field together replanting corn with hoes. I was using an old grubbing hoe that weighed six or seven pounds while Pap had a light one, the handle of which had been half burned off in the middle. He had told me repeatedly to hit the ground harder in making a hole to plant the corn, but the heavy grubbing hoe sank deep enough into the ground of its own weight. So I would hit the ground fairly hard when he was looking and do as I pleased when he was not.

Finally he caught me at my deception and yelled out from a distance of fifty yards, "Hugh, I shan't speak to you again." Then raising his light hoe high in the air he brought it down with great force, shouting at the same time, "Bring your hoe down like this."

But Pap had put entirely too much enthusiasm into his demonstration and the hoe handle broke at the burned place. Before I knew what I was doing I tauntingly shouted, "Yes, indeed," and then burst out laughing.

That was too much for Pap. With a roar he came running, waving the fragment of the hoe handle and sputtering, "Ain't that a nice way for a boy to treat his father?"

"And that's a nice way for a father to treat a son," I shouted right back.

He was mad as a hornet and so was I to think that he would try to whip me when I was this big. So I stood there planning what to do, but there was little time for thought and I probably did the wrong thing. In any case, I raised the grubbing hoe as if to use it in defense and stood my ground. My plan was to stand him off with a bluff, if it worked, and if it didn't I planned to run with all my might — for I knew I could outrun him and get away.

But he stopped about ten feet from me, turned on his heel and walked back to his broken hoe which he picked up and took to the house. When I went in for dinner he was in bed with a high fever and lay there several days. When finally he got over it and began to mix with us again I expected him to do something to square the account. He never did, however, and that was the last time he ever tried his hand on me. The next time we locked horns cured him completely. It was this way.

I had a girl living in Sperry, fifteen miles away. It was a long ride on horseback, and it was hard to plan satisfactory hours with her and yet tend to the farm chores at the regular time. Like most boys, I was inclined to let the chores slide on Sunday evenings and let the pigs get fed as best they could or wait until the following morning. It would never hurt them, I always told myself.

On this particular occasion I had borrowed John Cappes' buggy and was hitching a span of three year old colts as I dreamed of the grand time I was soon to

enjoy. My pleasant reverie was interrupted by the unpleasant sound of my father's voice asking me where I thought I was going. I told him I was going to Sperry. "To see that whiffet of a girl, I suppose," he exploded. But I kept my temper and refused to answer him, for Mother was within hearing distance and I didn't want to say something that would hurt her.

I hitched the last trace and started to climb into the buggy when Pap came charging out toward me with the command to unhitch the horses and turn them into the pasture. "Get a girl close home," he shouted, "so you can be here to do the chores on time."

This made me mad clean through, and when a fellow gets to that pitch he isn't afraid of anything and doesn't care very much for the consequences. Quick as a flash I landed in the buggy and gave the word to the horses. Pap came running and took them by the bits, determined to frustrate my plans. But I poured the whip into the colts and they reared right up on their hind legs as if they were going to jump over him. This forced him to duck out of the way. As I turned to drive off he yelled after me, "You be back at sundown to do the chores or you can settle with me." All I did was shake my head.

The farther I drove the madder I got and the more precious my Doxie Jane seemed to me. This lasted ten miles or more, but by the time I got to Sperry I had cooled off considerable. But I couldn't think of anything else all afternoon and my girl noticed something was wrong, but I never told her what.

When the time came to start for home I put my team in a livery stable and went to bed. I stayed at my girl's house until ten o'clock the next day, then I started leisurely homeward, for I wanted to be late. I craved an encounter with Pap that would put an end to this sort of thing. I drove into the barnyard full of fight and honing for trouble. I unharnessed the colts, turned them loose in the pasture and went into the house to change into my working clothes. But Pap had gone to Yarmouth without even mentioning our tilt. Mother, however, feared that trouble was brewing. And I hoped she was right.

When I came in from the field that evening Pap was in the barn lot waiting and asked me something or other about the corn. To my complete surprise, he chatted pleasantly about his trip into town. Two things bothered me. I had supposed that he would be in bed with another fever, and I had imagined he would settle with me as he had threatened. Neither one happened.

After that we got along fine as a fiddle, though we didn't do much talking. I began to take a liking to Pap as soon as I had him licked and he quit trying to bully me. After I was married and got to going back home to visit I fell in love with him, for I discovered he was a most entertaining host, a gentle and kind-hearted man. He just never had learned to get along with children. It cost him dearly, as it cost us all.

And I don't want to say that Pap was always ornery

to us. He had his good streaks as well as anybody. He was a wonderful provider for his family, he taught us the value of work, and was as honest as the day was long.

Pap had always asked the blessing at the dinner table with exactly the same words.

"Oh, Lord, bless us, save us all in Heaven. We ask for Christ the great Redeemer's sake, Amen."

Three times daily for sixty years Pap said that blessing. We all had it memorized, of course, but we bowed our heads and were as quiet as mice while he said it.

Sundays or when we had guests, he had a somewhat different blessing: *"Oh, Lord, bless us all as thou seest we need. Go with us through the journey of life, pardon and forgive us all our sins and at last in Heaven save us. We ask for Christ the great Redeemer's sake, Amen."* That was all the praying I ever heard Pap do. I guess he and Mother both tried to live up to what Christ taught about doing your praying in secret. And I still think that is about the right way. A heap of the praying one hears sounds just like it was fixed up for people to hear instead of God, and I reckon that kind never gets much higher than people's heads.

We got a lot of fun out of Pap's queer ways. Once he bought a jackass, and was all fired up over the business of raising a flock of mules. He wasn't satisfied to treat that animal like other folks but insisted on driving him hitched to the road cart. It was a funny sight with Pap perched up behind that diminutive, long-

eared ass riding along at a snail's pace on the roadway.

The village of Yarmouth was but two miles away and it took Pap over an hour to drive that donkey there. He could make the trip back in thirty or forty minutes, for it was down hill most of the way and the donkey wanted to get back to his hay. Once Pap hitched this animal to a single shovel cultivator and tried to plow the potato patch with him. He didn't have any luck keeping the animal in the row and the donkey walked over so many hills that Pap either had to give up or call for help. Since Pap never gave up, he called my sister Belle to come out and lead the beast while he held the plow handles.

But that jackass didn't lead any better than he drove. He would lower his big, burly head and go heaving recklessly along, trampling the finest row of potatoes in the patch. At the end of the row he would head right into the garden fence and twice he fairly butted Belle over. He was so unruly, dumb and awkward that she had a hard time keeping him from stepping on her feet. Finally Belle started to cry, so Pap got one of the big boys to take her place. Frank jumped on the jack's back, wrapped his long legs around him, cuffed him over the ears and put him through the patch at such a speed that Pap had to run to keep up. Altogether they trampled a third of the plants and plowed under another third. But it was a good year and we had all the potatoes we needed despite that donkey.

The jackass never satisfied Pap. On the advice of

a neighbor named Lander, he put the animal in a dark stall and fed him a diet of potato peelings. It always seemed to me that Lander meant a stall that was slightly darkened and a diet of potato peelings mixed with grain, but Pap took the advice literally and chinked up all the cracks in an old log crib, making it as dark as the inside of a cow. It took all our men to force the jack into that dark hole, but we finally overcame him and latched him in. For months Pap had all the neighbor women saving potato peelings for him and the only daylight that poor donkey saw was when Pap opened the door to give him a pail of water and his peck of potato peelings.

But instead of doing better the jack did worse and got as scrawny as a sick rabbit. When Pap finally decided to let him out, the donkey was as blind as a bat, his eyes stayed sore for weeks and his ears sunburned badly. Pap then fixed a half-darkened stall and put the donkey on a Christian diet that had him back on his feet in a short time. But Pap never admitted his error and soon got rid of the donkey, thus removing the visible evidence of his folly. Pap never did things by halves.

He had a keen sense of humor, too, but kept it pretty well in the background while we were children. He used to tell about a man he hired once to cut a field of wheat with a cradle. The man kept complaining that the cradle did not hang to suit him. So Pap took a wrench and shifted the blade for him, but the man still complained that it failed to suit him. Pap changed the position of the handles, but the man still com-

plained that it did not suit his tastes. In desperation Pap took the cradle to the blacksmith and had it adjusted all over so that it was just like a new one. But the fellow still complained that it did not hang to suit him. Finally, in disgust, Pap told the man to hang it for himself and see if he could do it any better. The man walked over to a tree and hung the cradle on a limb. There it hung to suit him exactly.

Pap also liked to tell of the time he engaged another man to cut wheat. The man came at sunrise and began immediately to whet the blade of the cradle. He whetted until called for breakfast, after eating he commenced to whet some more. He whetted, and whetted and whetted. About ten o'clock Pap went out to see how the man was getting on with the work, but there the fellow stood under the shade of a tree still whetting. Pap scolded him for not getting to work in the field but the man replied, "there is nothing lost by whettin'."

He whetted until dinnertime without cutting a straw of wheat. Pap told him he was a fool and that he would never pay for time wasted in such fashion. But the man only turned his warnings aside with the reply, "there is nothing lost by whettin'." After dinner he went out and began to whet some more. Pap checked again at three o'clock only to discover that the man was still whetting. Pap tried to dismiss the foolish worker, but he just grinned and reassured him that "there is nothing lost by whettin'." When Pap returned to supper and the man hadn't cut a single

swath but protested loudly that "there is nothing lost by whettin'," Pap was so disgusted he refused to talk to the man at all.

But after supper the man took up his cradle and began to fell the golden grain with long sweeps. Around and around the field he flew, laying the cradlefuls in straight swaths ready for the rakers and binders. Just as the sun went down Pap went out to see what was going on. He discovered that the man had completed the ten acre field and, having finished at the far end, was headed toward the house cutting six rows of corn as he came. When he came in he winked his eye at Pap and muttered with a chuckle, "there is nothing lost by whettin'."

Some of Pap's stories sounded familiar, but we enjoyed them anyway. Like most of us he sometimes slipped in the personal pronoun when it was not required, and he was never guilty of ruining a good story by strictly sticking to the facts.