

*yankee*

*jack*

About once every month in the summertime Yankee Jack would come driving by with his huckster wagon. Yankee Jack was a dark complexioned, little dried-up bachelor who didn't have any folks nearer than New Hampshire. He knew everybody in the county and had a good time riding all over, cooking and eating out of doors every day, doing all the time just what we got

to do only once in a great while. It helped a good deal to have Yankee Jack come by, for it made life more pleasant for us all.

Yankee Jack's wagon was built like a little house on wheels, with doors in the back and a little cupola in front for him to ride in, covered with a roof to keep off the sun. When a big rain came he would slide back through a trap door into his little store, for he had lines so long that he could drive from there and keep dry.

When he opened the back doors to get out the extracts and groceries, and other things that Mother used to trade chickens for, a pleasant odor came out. There was most everything in that wagon: calico, gingham, shoes, hats, extracts, groceries and a whole lot more. Along the sides he had strung buckets, and on top he carried a lot of coops to hold the chickens he traded for. Under the side he had built an airtight box, with a padlock on it, for carrying butter. Beside his driving seat he had a place for egg cases. Right below where his feet rested on the dashboard he kept his grub, cooking things, and other personal gear.

Yankee Jack always had something to tell us about what was going on in another township, or how a big bridge was washed out, or something like that. He told us once about driving through a swarm of bees which lit all over him, got tangled up in his chicken coops, and bothered him for several days before he got rid of them. Another time he told of driving seven or eight miles over a swarm of traveling potato bugs crossing the road. He claimed they were more than six inches deep in the

road and his horses and wagon wheels squashed bushels of them. The bugs made big blisters on the horses' fetlocks and took all the paint off the wagon wheels half way to the hubs, he said.

There was nearly always a big scare going around about a tiger getting away from a circus and running loose in the woods, and lots of people claimed they got a glimpse of him a time or two. Yankee Jack could be depended on to keep us posted on where he was, for he went everywhere and claimed he had seen the tiger several times, right out in the open road.

All in all, he was a mighty interesting person to us. He was a model for many of us boys who wanted to be peddlers like Yankee Jack and see the world for ourselves. As we grew older, we lost interest in Yankee Jack.

About that time a man came through the country peddling a book called *Peele's Popular Educator*, and I wanted one so bad I could hardly stand it. I asked Mother if she could do anything with Pap about buying it for me, and she tried. But Pap said four dollars was not picked up in the road every day, and we knew by that his mind was made up. But Mother patted me on the head and said she would try to help me out.

By the time the man came back in about a week, Mother had sold several pounds of butter and ten or twelve dozen eggs, giving her a dollar and fifty cents. She told the peddler that if he would leave the book she would pay him the balance with egg and butter money within six weeks. But he wouldn't do it and drove off, and I was just heartbroken. Next day was Sunday, and

John Conkling and his family came riding by in their democrat and asked me to go along to Sunday School. On the way to church I told John about the fine book and how bad I felt about not having one. He was mighty interested, and when we got back to our house he called Pap out and told him he ought to get me that book. He said not many boys were as crazy about good books as I was, and while it wasn't any of his business, he told Pap he would like to see me get the book.

Pap gave me a runt pig that evening, and told me if I would doctor it up, feed it well, and make a good shoat out of it, in a few months it would sell for enough to pay for the book. So at it I went, just tickled pink, for it was the first thing Pap had ever given me.

But before two weeks went by my sister Gussie came home on a visit from Morning Sun, where she had been working in brother Bob's millinery store. She offered to lend me the two dollars and fifty cents I was shy, and told me I could pay her back when I sold the pig. The peddler had left his name and post office address on a slip of paper, so I wrote him a letter. He came the day after he got it and delivered the book.

For months after that I didn't do anything else, all my spare time, but study that book. It had everything in it — long measure, dry measure, apothecary weight, troy weight, how to calculate the bushels of corn in a crib and hay in a mow or stack, and goodness knows how many thousands more things. It had pictures of all the flags in the world, the signs of the zodiac, all about eclipses, astronomy, all the presidents, generals, in-

ventors, and "big" men. If there was anything Peele forgot to put in that book, I never found it out. Ask any question you pleased, you could find the answer in *Peele's Popular Educator*.

There were pages of the finest handwriting I had ever seen. The capital letters were all shaded, and at the end of lots of words would be great scrolls, and maybe a good looking bird perched right in one. There was an uncommon fine drawing of an American Eagle, and a picture of the Saviour made with a pen without taking it off the paper. I practiced all these things myself, over and over and over, 'til I got to be the talk of the neighborhood for the fine things I could make with a pen. Other boys worked at the same thing, and that winter we had a writing school at Zion's hall, taught by a fine writer named Burns, who ran the telegraph office.

*Peele's Popular Educator* opened up a new world for me. When I had learned all I could from it, I managed to get more good books. Mother bought *The Footprints of Time* and *General Grant's Book*, and Chauncey Blodgett let me borrow books to read. I sort of lost all hankering for devilment and studied like a good fellow. Once I got a taste for things like that, I began to feel like somebody.