## Master Dove's One-Room School



here he is! The
Master's coming!"
Jeremiah Gladstone
abruptly reversed his
direction
abandoned the
squirrel he had been
chasing, and dashed

toward the schoolhouse. Following 35 or so other boys of assorted ages, sizes, and backgrounds, he nearly vaulted the two-foot wooden fence, tan up the path, and pushed inside the door of the one-room, wooden building. The year was 1775 in the Massachusetts Colony, and Jeremiah Gladstone was nine years old.

Once inside, the boys wasted no time in finding their seats, for Master Dove was not noted for dealing kindly with tardy pupils.

The Master arrived promptly at 7 a.m. in the spring and fall and 8 a.m. in the

winter, and he expected to see his students in their seats when he arrived. Jeremiah was not interested in incurring the Master's wrath, so he wedged himself onto one of the backless benches in the first row, on the side of, the room.

There were two rows of pine benches on three sides of the room. facing the huge, pot bellied stove in the center. Behind the benches, against each wall, there was a continuous, sloping shelf at walst level which the older students used —as a support to lear against while they were studying, and as a desk while they were writing. There was a narrower shelf under it on which they could store their books and supplies. Within the square of the outer benches, there was a line of lower benches for the smaller children. The space in the middle of the room served as a kind of stage for recitations.

The Master's desk was in the front of the room, next to the door. Jeremiah knew that inside that massive piece of oak were the tops, balls, marbles, and other forbidder items which Master Dove confiscated from his pupils with uncanny regularity. Just yesterday, Jeremiah himsel had been the victim of the Master's quick hand, and had lost the prized penknife which his older brother Thomas had entrusted to him last summer. He had promised to guard it while Thomas was away at college in nearby Cambridge, and Jeremiah dreaded disappointing his brother

While he brooded, the din in the classroom mounted to an earsplitting pitch. Then suddenly it stopped, and the room became silent. Jeremiah dragged himself out of his miserable reverie and waited expectantly for Master Dove to march through the door. As usual, he prayed that one of these days the Master would arrive having been transformed the previous night into a kind, twinkling man: maybe someone like his uncle Joseph, who always had a piece of maple sugar in his, pocket and could make anyone laugh.

But, alas, today was not the day, for in strode Master Dove looking rigid and sour, brandishing the dreaded, ever-present ferble, with his three-cornered hat riding majestically atop his impeccable gray wig. Even his worn gray silk waistcoat with its rows of silver buttons rode rigidly on his lanky frame, as if reluctant to flow naturally for fear of being punished.

Jeremiah found it hard to believe that the schoolmaster had been born with such a sour disposition, and he was forever looking for some sad, mystical reason for Master Dove's transformation. The lad's father, who knew a lot about most things and didn't put much stock in sad mysticism, said that Master Dove was probably "of a sour ben," because he had to work very hard, not only teaching his



nupils but also helping to maintain the shool building, for which he was paid only \$30 per year. Jeremiah thought that was a let of money to pay such a crotchety person.

"Good morning. Master Dove," chanted the boys in unison, at no seeming cue other than the Master's arrival at his desk. He peered over the top of his square, tortoiseshell glasses, and gazed at his charges who shifted uncomfortably against one another.

Jeremiah knew by heart what the I procedure for the day would be. It would start with the "first class" (the oldest boys) reading from the Scriptures. Then would come the thawing and watering of the ink, in preparation for writing, which consumed a major portion of the morning. Not a meticulous person by nature. Jeremiah didn't care much for the discipline involved in copying for page after page such phrases as "Contentment is a virtue" or "Procrastination is the thief of time" - two of Master Dove's favorites until he had mastered the letters. He was consoled, nevertheless, by his fascination -with the ink he used and the process of inkmaking that his father had taught him when he started going to school. Together they had gathered the bark of swamp maple and boiled it in an iron kettle to give it a more perfect black color. When it thickened, they had added copperas, or green vitriol to it. Jeremiah loved to dip his quill pen into the ink and make huge swirls on his paper. but he knew that paper was scarce and must not be wasted.

After writing, it would be the turn of the second class to read from the Scriptures, and then the turn of Jeremiah's class. After, that, the smallest children would be called out to read a sentence or two from their reader, the Hombook, since they were not yet ready to read from the Scriptures. Jeremiah still had his Hornbook, which really wasn't a book at all. It was a thin

board on which was pasted a printed leaf containing the alphabet and some short sentences. This was covered with a thin sheet of transparent horn to protect it from the inv. :bly dirty fingers it would fall prey to.

Promptly at half past ten each morning, the boys were allowed to go outside for a short recess. On the way back inside, each child was permitted a drink of water from the pail near the door, but Jeremiah was always one of the last ones back inside so he generally got only a longing look at the water, and a menacing look from Master Dove.

The rest of the morning was spent working on spelling, and Jeremiah liked to make this part of the day into a game. While Master Dove read out words from the handsome WATTS Compleat SPELLING BOOK, and then waited as the class spelled the words out loud. Jeremiah tried to see how often he could be the first to finish.

And then it was time for lunch. Jeremiah walked the half-mile home for lunch with his cousin George, who was 11 and in the first class, and George's brother Matthew. who was seven and, to Jeremiah's mind, a hateful pest. Jeremiah wished his own brothers were closer to him in age so they could walk home from school with him. but Thomas was 15 and studying at Harvard College, and Jabez was only three. Nearer his own age were his two sisters. ten-year old Abigail, and Rebecca, who was eight and his favorite. Their days were spent at home with their mother, learning how to cook and sew, because as Jeremiah's father rightly said, "A gentleman has no interest in an educated woman." Jeremiah thought that this made sense because most girls were silly anyway, although he recently overheard his parents saying that some of the daughters of the townspeople were attending school for a couple of hours

each day after the boys went home. Supposedly the schools were built for everyone, rich or poor, and to some pec that even meant girls. Abigail and Rebecca, however, took dancing lesson; instead because their parents thought t was more important.

After lunch. Jeremiah returned to sel for the afternoon, which commenced i each class reading out loud in turn from The New England Primer, an 88-page. 3 1/2:inch by 4 1/2-inch leather-bound book which, except for some spelling lessons and an occasional illustration. didn't hold Jeremiah's interest. He knew was important to learn the Westminster Catechism, but he had great difficulty memorizing the tedious questions and answers. He forced himself to concentra on it because he knew he would have to recite a portion this Sunday in church, a he definitely didn't want to disgrace his family by not being prepared. Aside from the obvious embarrassment in church fo any child who had not memorized his catechism. Master Dove's own brand of disapproval, manifested with the help of the ferule, was not something Jeremiah coveted.

When each class had completed its reading from the primer, there was more spelling, and finally some arithmetic. There was no textbook for this study, but Master Dove, like most schoolmasters, ga each boy pages of handwritten rules and problems from a manuscript sum-book which he had studied from when he was a boy. Jeremiah couldn't imagine that the Master had ever been a boy, much less or who had had as much trouble struggling with problems and sums as Jeremiah himself did.

The boys were usually weary by this time, because the day was long, and they knew it was almost five o'clock, the time. that school was dismissed. The fire in the stove was waning, and Jeremiah was chilly and hungry. The dismally vacant walls an stained, gritty windows didn't do much to cheer him up, and he sorely wished therewas something of interest in the classroom for him to look at. Across the room, two o the youngest boys were fidgeting and' pushing each other, trying to see who would be forced off the bench and into th Master's wrath first. Jeremiah hoped that school would end before the Master caugh them.

"And tomorrow, Jeremiah Gladstone will light the fire before school." Master Dove planted his hat firmly on his curls, and strode from the room. Jeremiah breathed a sigh of relief and suddenly, forgetting his fatigue, hunger, or the coloran from the schoolhouse to find that squirrel.

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