

Master Dove's One-Room School



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 forbidden items which Master Dove confiscated from his pupils with uncanny regularity. Just yesterday, Jeremiah himself 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 ferule, 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



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 neatly vaulted the two-foot wooden fence, ran 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 waist level which the older students used—as a support to lean 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.

In Adam's fall
We sinned all

Thy life to
mend,
God's Book at-
tend.

The Oak God
play,
And after play

A Dog will bite
A thief at
night.

The Eagle's
flight
is out of sight.

The His Foot
is whipped a
school.



