

ADVENTURES OF A COUNTRY BOY

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Adventures of a Country Boy by Jacob Abbott & Clifton Johnson

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JACOB ABBOTT & CLIFTON JOHNSON

ADVENTURES OF A COUNTRY BOY



"SWING THRICE—AND OVER!"
(See p. 170)

ADVENTURES OF A COUNTRY BOY

By Jacob Abbott

Retold by Clifton Johnson



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E. P. I

INTRODUCTION

BY LYMAN ABBOTT

ALL good men love children, but my father not only loved, he respected them. This respect which he had for children was, I think, the secret of his power over them, which was quite as remarkable as his literary success in writing for them. In a true sense it might be said that he treated children as his equals, not through any device or from any scheme, but spontaneously and naturally.

He never deceived children, never tricked them with cunning devices, never lied to them. This may seem small praise, yet men—and for that matter women—who never lie to children are, I am afraid, a rather small minority. A promise to a child was quite as sacred in his eyes as a promise to a grown person. He would as soon have thought of defaulting on a promissory note as defaulting on a promise to a child. He trusted the judgment of children, took counsel

with them, not in a false pretense but in reality, and in all the matters which concerned them and their world was largely governed by their judgments. He threw responsibility upon them, great responsibility, and they knew it. The audacity of his confidence surprises me even now as I look back upon it. I entered college before I was fourteen. My father not only let me choose the college for myself, but made me decide for myself whether I would go to college. When the time for entrance examination approached, he called me to him, told me that if I went into business as an errand boy he would lay up for me every year what the college life would cost him, so that at eighteen I should have a capital of two thousand dollars and interest. Thus I not only had to decide that I would go to college, but also had to decide that I was willing to give up two thousand dollars for a college education, and two thousand dollars was a large sum to my boyish mind. But, as a result, I took college life with great seriousness, quite resolved to get the two thousand dollars' value out of the education. This act was quite characteristic of my father. Though he was my wisest counselor, I cannot

remember that he ever gave me a definite and specific piece of advice; he put questions before me with great clearness, summed up the *pros* and *cons* like a judge upon the bench, and then left me to be the final arbiter.

This respect which he showed to children inspired them with respect for themselves and for one another. It gave dignity to the children who came under his influence. That influence was a masterful one. I should misrepresent him if I gave the impression that he exercised no authority. On the contrary, his authority was supreme and final; he gave few commands, but he required prompt, implicit, and unquestioning obedience to those which he did give. I have known children to disobey him, but I never knew one to rebel against him. I do not know what would have happened in case of a rebellion. I think no child ever thought of it as possible. I never knew him to strike a blow. I do not recall that he ever sent a child to his room, or supperless to bed, or set him to write in his copy book, or to learn tasks, or resorted to any other of the similar expedients, necessary perhaps in school, and frequent in most families. In general he

simply administered natural penalties. If a child lied or broke his promises, he was distrusted. If he was careless or negligent, the things which were given to other children to play with were withheld from him. If he quarreled, he was taken away from his playmates, but made as happy as he could be made in solitude. The children were themselves encouraged to inflict a kind of child penalty. In the yard at Fewacres, his country home, which was a favorite playground for invited children from the village, as well as for his own grandchildren, he had a square stone set up. Then he said, "If any child gets cross and sulky and cries, he can go and sit on the 'crying stone' just as long as he wants to and cry it out." Whenever any child did grow sulky and cross, all the rest of the children clamored, "To the crying stone, to the crying stone," and it is needless to say that it was rarely the case that a child took advantage of the prerogative thus afforded him. This little incident I recall simply because it is significant of my father's methods with children. He distinguished sharply, and the children quickly learned to distinguish between advice and law.