

I don't mind staying after school I says to professor Herbert, "but I'd rather you'd whip me with a switch and let me go home early. Pa will whip me anyway for getting home two hours late." "Seein' is believin'," Pap allus told me." Pa walks out of the office with Professor Herbert. I just hoped Professor Herbert didn't have Pa arrested for pulling his gun. Pa's gun has always been a friend to him when he goes to settle disputes. The bell rang. School took up. I saw the students when they marched in the schoolhouse look at Pa. They would grin and punch each other. Pa just stood and watched them pass in at the schoolhouse door. Two long lines marched in the house. The boys and girls were clean and well dressed. Pa stood over in the schoolyard under a leafless elm, in his sheepskin coat, his big boots laced in front with buckskin, and his heavy socks stuck above his boot tops. Pa's overalls legs were baggy and wrinkled between his coat and boot tops. His blue work shirt showed at the collar. His big black hat showed his gray-streaked black hair. His face was hard and weather-tanned to the color of a ripe fodder blade. His hands were big and gnarled like the roots of the elm tree he stood beside. When I went to my first class I saw Pa and Professor Herbert going around over the schoolhouse. I was in my geometry class when Pa and Professor Herbert came in the room. We were explaining our propositions on the blackboard. Professor Herbert and Pa just quietly came in and sat down for awhile. I heard Fred Wutts whisper to Glenn Armstrong, "Who is that old man? You'll jist go down there and show off and plague your own boy Dave to death in front o' all th' scholars!" I'll show 'im it ain't right to keep one boy in and let the rest go scot-free. My boy is good as th' rest, ain't he? A bullet will make a hole in a schoolteacher same as it will anybody else. He can't do me that way and get by with it. I'll plug 'im first. I aim to go down there bright and early in the mornin' and get all this straight! I aim to see about bug larnin' and this runnin' all over God's creation huntin' snakes, lizards, and frogs. Ransackin' th' country and goin' through cherry orchards and breakin' th' trees down atter lizards! Old Eif Crabtree ought to a-poured th' hot lead to 'em instead o' chargin' six dollars fer th' tree! He ought to a-got old Herbert th' first one!" I saw- Pa take his knife and scrape tartar from one of his teeth. I've got work here fer you to do!" We take a subject in school where we have to have bugs, snakes, flowers, lizards, frogs, and plants. It is biology. It was a pretly day today. We went out to find a few of these. Six of us boys saw a lizard at the same time sunning on a cherry tree. We all went up the tree to get it. We broke the tree down. It split at the forks. Eif Crabtree was plowing down below us. He ran up the hill and got our names. The other boys gave their dollar apiece. I didn't have mine. Professor Herbert put mine in for me. I have to work it out at school. "They can railroad you for that!" Professor Herbert ain't goin' to take it to court. He likes me. I like 'im. We jist had to get together. He had the remedies. He showed me. You must go on to school. I am as strong a man as ever come out'n th' hills fer my years and th' hard work I've done. But I'm behind, Dave. I'm a little man. Your hands will be softer than mine. Your clothes will be better. You'll allus look cleaner than your old Pap. Jist remember, Dave, to pay your debts and be honest. Jist be kind to animals and don't bother th' snakes. That's all I got agin th' school. Puttin' black snakes to sleep and cuttin' 'em open." I don't like no sicha foolish way o' larnin' myself!" Pa hadn't forgot. I'd have to take him to school with me. He would take me to school with him. We were going early. I was glad we were going early. If Pa pulled a gun on Professor Herbert there wouldn't be so many of my classmates there to see him. I knew that Pa wouldn't be at home in the high school. He wore overalls, big boots, a blue shirt and

a sheepskin coat and a slouched black hat gone to seed at the top. He put his gun in its holster. We started trudging toward the high school across the hill. It was early when we got to the county high school. Professor Herbert had just got there. I just thought as we walked up the steps into the schoolhouse, "Maybe Pa will find out Professor Herbert is a good man." I had to do all th' milkin' tonight, chop th' wood myself. It's too hard on me after I've turned ground all day. I'm goin' to take a day off tomorrow and see if I can't remedy things a little. I'll go down to that high school tomorrow. I won't be a very good scholar for Professor Herbert nohow. He won't keep me in after school. I'll take a different kind of lesson down there and make 'im acquainted with it." I would take a bundle of fodder, remove the hickory witherband from around it, and scatter it on rocks, clumps of green briars, and brush so the cattle wouldn't tramp it under their feet. It's a lot in knowing the other fellow." Professor Herbert's eyes got big behind his black-rimmed glasses when he saw Pa's gun. Color came into his pale cheeks. He's the only one out'n eleven youngins I've sent to high school. Here he comes in late and leaves me all th' work to do! He said you's all out bug huntin' yesterday and broke a cherry tree down. He had to stay two hours after school yesterday and work out money to pay on that cherry tree! Is that right?" "We were not only hunting snakes, toads, flowers, butterflies, lizards," says Professor Herbert, "but, Mr. Sexton, I was hunting dry timothy grass to put in an incubator and raise some protozoa." I thought as I swept the floor, "What will Pa do to me? What lie can I tell him when I go home? Why did we ever climb that cherry tree and break it down for anyway? Why did we run crazy over the hills away from the crowd? Why did we do all of this? Six of us climbed up in a little cherry tree after one little lizard! Why did the tree split and fall with us? It should have been a stronger tree! Why did Eif Crabtree just happen to be below us plowing and catch us in his cherry tree? Why wasn't he a better man than to charge us six dollars for the tree?" Sexton, and following the course of study the state provided us with." Varmint study? Takin' youngins to th' woods and their poor old Ma's and Pa's at home a-slavin' to keep 'em in school and give 'em a education! You know that's dangerous, too, puttin' a lot o' boys and girls out together like that!" I don't allow 'em killed on my place." The students look at Pa. They seem to like him better after he said that. Pa with a gun in his pocket but a tender heart beneath his ribs for snakes, but not for man! Pa won't whip a mule at home. He won't whip his cattle. We have the drop on 'em. Ain't nothin' to a man that'll beat a good pullin' mule. He ain't got th' right kind o' a heart!" "I'll straighten this thing out myself! I'll take keer o' Professor Herbert myself! He ain't got no right to keep you in and let the other boys off jist because they've got th' money! I'm a poor man. A bullet will go in a professor same as it will any man. It will go in a rich man same as it will a poor man. Now you get into this work before I take one o' these withes and cut the shirt off'n your back!" "The boys didn't have any business all climbing that cherry tree after one lizard. One boy could have gone up in the tree and got it. The farmer charged us six dollars. It was a little steep, I think, but we had it to pay. Must I make five boys pay and let your boy off? He said he didn't have the dollar and couldn't get it. So I put it in for him. I'm letting him work it out. He's not working for me. He's working for the school!" I ain't got much larnin' myself but I do know right from wrong after I see through a thing." Professor Herbert went home. Pa and I stayed and swept one hour. It looked funny to see Pa use a broom. He never used one at home. Mom used the broom. Pa used the plow. Pa did hard work. Pa says, "I can't sweep. Nineteen head of cattle to feed, four mules, twenty-five hogs,

firewood and stovewood to cut, and water to draw from the well. I aim to go with you this mornin' and look into bug larnin', frog larnin', lizard and snake larnin', and breakin' down cherry trees!" It jist don't look good to me," says Pa, "a-takin' all this swarm of youngins out to pillage th' whole deestrick." I don't know what that is," says Pa. "Th' incubator is th' new-fangled way o' cheatin' th' hens and raisin' chickens. I could tell him we studied frogs, birds, snakes, lizards, flowers, insects. I would carry bundles of the fodder from the stack until I had spread out a bundle for each steer. It ain't no school nohow!" It will kill a rich man same as a poor man. It will kill a man. But atter I come in and saw you, I know'd I wouldn't need it. This maul o' mine could do you up in a few minutes." We didn't have all this bug larnin', frog larnin', and findin' germs on your teeth and in the middle o' black snakes!" It's there. That's the germ. Germs live in a world we cannot see with the naked eye. We must use the microscope. There are millions of them in our bodies. Some are harmful. Others are helpful." He said for me to go home with you." He's a good man. School has changed from my day and time. I'm a dead leaf, Dave. I'm behind. I don't belong here. If he'll let me I'll get a broom and we'll both sweep one hour. That pays your debt. I'll hep you pay it. I'll ast 'im and see if he won't let me hep you." "You must stay two hours after school today and two hours after school tomorrow. I am allowing you twenty-five cents an hour. That is good money for a high-school student. You can sweep the schoolhouse floor, wash the blackboards, and clean windows. I'll pay the dollar for you." "What in th' world has kept you so? Why ain't you been here to help me with this work? Make a gentleman out'n one boy in th' family and this is what you get! Send you to high school and you get too onery fer th' buzzards to smell!" "That's just what I'll do in th' mornin'," says Pa. "Jist whose cherry tree did you break down?" "I jist don't know what you could a-done with 'im," says Pa, "only a-larruped im with a withe!" "You've heard of germs, Mr. Sexton, haven't you?" "All right, Luster, you've heard of germs, haven't you?" "I ain't so sure about th' breed o' chickens you mentioned." says Professor Herbert. "I'm sixty-five years old and I ain't seen one yet!" "No," says Pa, "jist readin', writin', and cipherin'. Lord, he's a rough-looking scamp." Glenn whispered back, "I think he's Dave's Pap." Professor Herbert put it on the lens and adjusted the microscope for Pa. He adjusted it and worked awhile. "We'll chloroform him and dissect him and show you he has germs in his body, too." "You'll haf to listen to me. I've larned a lot from you." "You are too big to whip," says Professor Herbert, "and I have to punish you for climbing up in that cherry tree." "I'll have to take the punishment. I wish it would be quicker punishment. I wouldn't mind." "I couldn't ask Professor Herbert to loan me a dollar. I saw Pa spreading fodder on the ground to the cattle. Pa stopped scattering the bundles of fodder. He looked at me. He says, "Why are you gettin' in here this time o' night? You tell me or I'll take a hickory withe to you right here on th' spot!" I says, "I had to stay after school." I couldn't lie to Pa. He'd go to school and find out why I had to stay. says Pa. I says, "Our biology class went on a field trip today." "Eif Crabtree's cherry tree!" "Do they jist let you get out and gad over th' hillsides?" "I'll take keer o' 'im. I'll go down there in th' mornin' and see 'im." "Ashamed of your old Pap are you, Dave," says Pa, "atter th' way I've worked to raise you! I would lean it up against the oak trees and the rocks in the pasture just above our pigpen on the hill. The fodder was cold and frosty where it had set out in the stacks. He would have loaned me a dollar to have paid my part on the cherry tree." "Plague or no plague," says Pa, "he don't take into consideration what all I haf to do here, does he? I could hardly study for thinking about Pa. He'll go to school with me in the morning. He'll take a gun for Professor

Herbert! What will Professor Herbert think of me! I'll tell him when Pa leaves that I couldn't help it. But Pa might shoot him. I hate to go with Pa. Maybe he'll cool off about it tonight and not go in the morning." Daylight came and we could see the bare oak trees covered white with frost. says Professor Herbert to Pa. "You see that little hole," says Pa as he picked up the long blue forty-four and put his finger on the end of the barrel, "a bullet can come out'n that hole that will kill a schoolteacher same as it will any other man. That's what he needed!" It jist didn't look fair to me! Work one and let th' rest out because they got th' money. I don't see what bugs has got to do with a high school! It don't look good to me nohow!" "I'll shore stay with you," says Pa. " I want to see th' germs off'n my teeth. They didn't have to feel sorry for me. I wasn't ashamed of Pa after I found out he wasn't going to shoot Professor Herbert. I wasn't ashamed of Pa. I wouldn't be as long as he behaved." "Man can defend hisself," says Pa, "but cattle and mules can't. Pa says, "Ain't you got two hours o' sweepin' yet to do?" I says, "Professor Herbert said I could do it some other time. I ran to the barn to spread fodder on the ground for the cattle.