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Old Johnny Appleseed



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APPLESEED

BY

OLIVE BEACRE MILLER

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Prepared by the Staff of the
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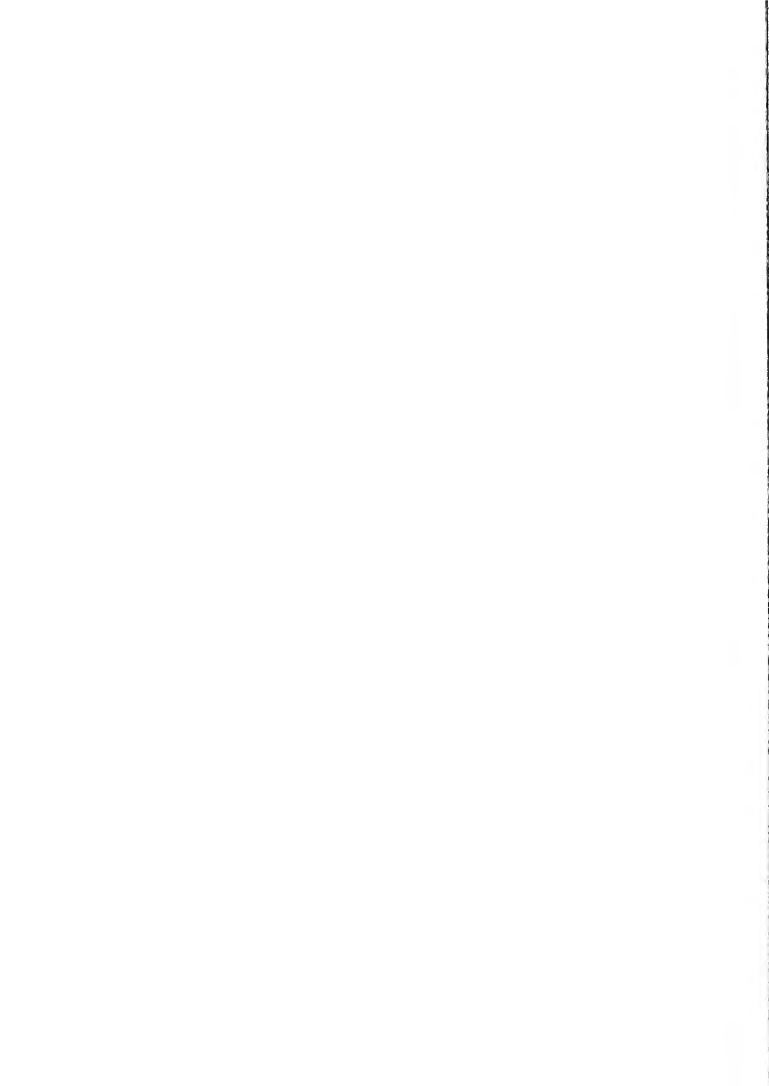
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FOREWORD

John Chapman, known in legend, drama, poem, and song as Johnny Appleseed, has become a favorite American folk hero. He is especially beloved and honored in Indiana, not only for his innate love of his fellow creatures and profound religious nature, but also for his dissemination of the edible apple tree in the Hoosier state. Johnny Appleseed spent his last years in the country about Fort Wayne and was buried near the city limits.

The following story originally appeared in **HEROES, OUTLAWS & FUNNY FELLOWS OF AMERICAN POPULAR TALES** by Olive Beaupre Miller. The publisher, Doubleday & Company, has graciously granted permission to reprint.

The Boards and the Staff of the Public Library of Fort Wayne and Allen County present this account with the hope that it will be interesting and informative to Library patrons.



BY THE YEAR 1811, many settlers, starting from the East in wagons, had crossed the Allegheny Mountains to the little log town of Pittsburgh. There they embarked on rude flatboats, floating down the Ohio River to settle in the wilderness of Ohio and Indiana. Watching these settlers come in greater numbers each year, the Indians who lived by Lake Erie or along the beautiful streams on Ohio's wooded hillsides, thought with dismay that the white man was taking all their lands. Spurred on by the British in Canada, the chiefs decided to rise to make one last attempt to get back their hunting grounds.

Roving in scattered bands, the red men fell on white settlements or any little log cabin that stood alone in a clearing. Families separated from neighbors by miles of forest and prairie lived in constant danger of hearing the war whoop sound and seeing a band of Indians come dashing out of the woods. The only hope of escape for settlers on these scattered farms was to be warned in time that Indians were near their homes so the family could get in a wagon and flee to the nearest blockhouse.

In those days a strange old man, barefooted and barelegged, dressed in nothing but a coffee sack with an old tin saucepan for a hat, wandered the leafy trails over hill and valley in Ohio. Queer-looking enough was Johnny with his bushy black hair and beard.

"You'd better look out, Johnny!" white men were always joking. "That thick head of hair of yours might tempt an Indian to scalp you. It would make a fine decoration for a brave to nail up on his tent post!"

But Johnny only grinned and shouted exultantly:

"The Lord is the strength of my life! Of whom shall I be afraid?"

Well enough Johnny knew that in all that vast stretch of wilderness he was the only American who could go to and fro as he chose, safe from attack by the Indians. For Johnny had no desire to own a foot of Indian land. In fact there was nothing on earth that Johnny wished to possess. The tattered old coffee sack was all he wanted for clothing and the saucepan in which he cooked mush was all he would wear for a hat. With the handle of the saucepan sticking out at a rakish angle from just behind one ear, he tramped on his way through the woods, singing in rain or sunshine and speaking in friendly fashion to white men and red men alike. Patting a bag full of appleseeds which he carried slung on his shoulder, he made the woods ring as he sang:

*"With my pack on my back wherever I go,
I've seeds in my sack which I everywhere sow:
Then the Lord comes along with his sunshine and rain
And makes every appleseed blossom again!"*

Old Johnny Appleseed, the settlers called this man, though his real name was John Chapman. Years ago he, too, had crossed the Alleghenies from his home in Massachusetts to live in Pennsylvania. But Johnny was a lover of orchards and there was no fruit save wild fruit out here in the West.

“Say, Ma, wild plums and crab apples is awful sour for eatin’,” children complained to their mothers.

So Johnny said that one night shining angels had come and showed him a beautiful vision. They had showed him the Heavenly City surrounded by glittering fruit trees and told him his mission on earth should be to wander about planting appleseeds in the West, so the wilderness might be glad and blossom like the Heavenly City.

Back and forth Johnny tramped from the cider mills in Pennsylvania, where he collected his seeds, to the wild lands of Ohio. And he dreamed of one thing only—to give these lonely settlers blooming apple orchards which should blossom pink in the springtime and droop their heavy branches full of apples in the fall.

“The Bible says, ‘Comfort me with apples!’ ” Johnny cried, “and with apples shall men be comforted in the wilderness of the West!”

When he came to some open space where the soil was rich and black beside a running brook, with the great trees of the forest standing off at a distance, Johnny stopped and planted his seeds, setting up camp alone within the shelter of the woods. Then he built a brush fence to keep chance passers off the sprouting orchard, leaving the seeds to grow until the time when settlers should come to make homes near the spot.

Sometimes Johnny slept on the ground, sometimes he slept in a cave or crept for protection at night into a hollow log. Often, too, his queer figure loomed up before the fire in the midst of an Indian camp where he would stay for a time binding up wounds for warriors and nursing the sick back to health. So different was Johnny from all other men, that the Indians thought he must be a powerful medicine man and even in these troubled times when palefaces seemed their foes, they let Old Johnny pass safely wherever he wished to go.

Johnny decided his duty was to warn white men of their danger if he knew that the Indians planned an attack on a certain place. When the moon shone bright at midnight over some lonely cabin, he appeared from the dark of the trees that

lay beyond the clearing. Rapping loudly on the front door, he cried in a piercing voice:

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me!”

To startled men, women, and children, wakened suddenly from their sleep, it seemed that a prophet out of the Bible was thundering at their door. John the Baptist had looked like that when he wandered the wilderness of Judea.

“The Lord hath anointed me to blow the trumpet in the wilderness and sound an alarm in the forest!” Old Johnny continued to shout. “For behold the tribes of the heathen are round about your doors. A devouring flame followeth after them!”

Then the frightened family hurried into their clothes. They ran with lanterns out through the darkness to hitch up the horses that stood in their barns. Piling into their big farm wagon, they made off in all haste to safety in the nearest log fort. But before they were on their way, the wild-looking herald had vanished into the shadowy forest to cry his alarm through the moonlight before some other cabin. Never for a moment resting, refusing to stop for food, Old Johnny traveled day and night warning settlers in Ohio.

At the bloody battle of Tippecanoe when Indians and white men were struggling in a jumble of feathered headdresses, tomahawks, flying bullets, and blue army uniforms, there was that queer old Johnny in the very midst of the fight. Not killing men, not Johnny! Johnny would never kill a single living thing, not even a mosquito! Johnny was dragging the wounded to safety behind the lines. Whizzing along through the air, two bullets hit Johnny in the breast. But Johnny never stopped his work. The bullets had struck the Bible which he always carried in his bosom to tell him about the angels. When the stress of the battle was over, Johnny took the Bible out and found the bullets embedded on a page of the book which said:

“The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death!”

“There’s nothing like the Bible,” he cried, “to protect a man

either from Indians or the sting of poisonous snakes!" And he went about barefooted where other men put thick wrappings around their legs and feet to protect them from the snakes which lurked everywhere in the grass.

Johnny spoke Indian languages and he understood all their signs. No red man in the country was a better woodsman than he. He knew every trail through the forests. He knew the trails made long ago by buffaloes when they wandered in search of pastures. And he knew the almost trackless paths which the Indians had secretly marked by breaking little branches from trees, so that new shoots grew straight upward while the broken ones hung toward the ground. So well did Johnny know all the life in the forests that the white men were always asking him to serve them as a scout. Backwoodsmen and Indian fighters were glad to call Johnny their friend.

One day Johnny wandered into a Shawnee village where he meant to stay for a time. He was whittling a tiny bow for a little Indian boy when all at once a band of braves came into the circle of tepees bringing with them a very small white girl no more than four years old. The child was crying bitterly and the men were wholly unable to make her cease her sobbing, so they turned her over to the squaws. Johnny knew little Mary. He knew the very cabin where she lived.

"Whoever perished being innocent?" he said as he looked at the child with a great pity in his heart. "The Lord preserveth the simple. He saves the children of the needy!" And Johnny started to think how he could manage in a friendly fashion to get Mary from the Indians.

All night the little girl cried and in the morning the squaws, hopeless of keeping her still, sent for Johnny to come to the wigwam and see what he could do. Johnny took the child in his arms. He spoke to her very gently and crooned a soothing song. In a moment she went to sleep and after that the Indians gave her over to Johnny's keeping.

Not long after this, Johnny was sitting with Mary under a tree near the tepees. He was whittling a doll's head for her

out of a bit of wood when he suddenly heard a commotion. Again a party of braves came into the camp with prisoners. One of these captives, a man who was being led along by a rope tied about his neck, was a backwoodsman dressed in buckskin with hands tied behind his back.

"Why it's Daniel Boone!" cried Johnny.

The man was laughing and joking as though he was having a fine time with no thought of danger at all at being in the hands of the Indians.

"Well, if there ain't Johnny Applesed!" cried Boone in the greatest delight. "I'm sure mighty glad to see you."

Old Johnny dropped the doll's head and went forward to greet his friend but big Chief Blackfish said:

"Ugh! No touch him, Johnny! He no Indian yet!"

Then Boone and his fellow prisoners were made to lie flat on the ground. The arms and legs of each were stretched out and tied to four stakes which were driven deep into the earth. As they lay there under the trees in such danger and such discomfort, Johnny sat down near by. He opened his Bible on his knees and started to read in a ringing voice:

"'Comfort ye! Comfort ye, my people!' saith your God. 'Fear thou not for I am with thee! I am with thee to save thee and deliver thee!' saith the Lord!"

And the men lying helpless before him felt comfort steal into their hearts.

That evening the Indians decided to send their prisoners off to the British in Detroit—all except Boone, that is. Boone was by far the most famous backwoodsman in the West. Boone they meant to keep and adopt as one of their tribe.

In the morning the other prisoners were sent on their way to Detroit. Johnny was sitting with Mary, telling her how bright angels, clothed in the clouds and rainbow, came down out of the sky to care for little children, when he saw an old Indian take Daniel and make him squat down before him. The old man plucked every hair, one by one from Boone's head, leaving nothing but the scalp lock that stood straight up from his crown.

"No fun have hair pulled!" cried Boone.

"No care," replied the Indian.

When this operation was over, Johnny watched a group of squaws rush Daniel down to the river. There they stripped him of all his clothes and scrubbed him roughly with brushes.

"We scrub all white blood out of him!" the women said to Johnny.

Thus purified of his white blood, Boone was decked out splendidly in beaded Indian finery with a headdress of many feathers. Then he was led before all the braves who sat about in a circle.

"Your name be Big Turtle," said Blackfish. "You be one of us now. My tribe do you heap big honor!" And the braves greeted Boone as their brother, while they passed the great pipe of fellowship slowly around the circle.

That night when the big July moon shone round and bright in the sky and the child was asleep in a wigwam, the feast of green corn was held. Johnny sat beside Daniel as the Indians feasted on game and offered before the Great Spirit heaps of golden corn in thanks for their bountiful harvest.

"Friend Daniel, be not afraid," whispered Johnny. "The Lord will send his angel to deliver you out of your danger, even as long ago he delivered that other Daniel, the servant of the living God, out of the den of lions."

"Don't worry, Johnny," said Boone. "I've a wife and family down in Kentucky and I mean to get away from here just as soon as I can."

Two weeks after this, Johnny persuaded the Indians to sell him the little white girl. He paid them two dollars for her and said farewell to Daniel as he started off through the woods. Soon he was standing before the door of a cabin in a little clearing, shouting triumphantly in a voice like a mighty angel's:

"Glory to God in the highest! I bring good tidings of great joy!"

And in another instant Mary was safe with her mother and father.

Some months later, Johnny heard that Boone had been sent by the Indians on a hunting trip alone. He had slipped off into the forest and managed to make his way home.

"He worketh signs and wonders who hath delivered Daniel!" said Johnny, patting his Bible.

When the war with the British and the Indians was over, and Johnny was no longer needed to save the wounded in battle or give warning of Indian attacks, he started to wander again and plant his appleseeds.

How he loved the rich smell of the soil! How he loved the tall trees of the forests and the wild flowers of woods and prairies! He loved the big antlered elk, the graceful does and small spotted fawns. He loved the little furry things that scurried in the underbrush.

No living creature feared Johnny for he never carried a gun. He jabbered squirrel-talk to the squirrels till they came and sat up before him, their little tails all a-quiver as they took nuts out of his hand. He whistled so robins flew to him thinking they heard their mates and he gobbled till all the wild turkeys flocked in a crowd about him. Even shy quails came out of the meadows in answer to his call, their tiny broods trailing behind them like bits of fluff in the grass.

Fawns sometimes followed Johnny so he had to speak harshly to them to make them go back to their mothers and one time the Indians saw him sitting on a fallen log as he talked to a big brown bear. The bear was squatting before him, dignified and sedate, with her two little cubs by her side, and all three were listening respectfully while Johnny told them good nuts could be found just down the valley.

When the settlers beheld Old Johnny talking to squirrels and rabbits, with the wild things of the forest gathered fearlessly about him, they said:

"He's like good St. Francis, the little brother of the birds, and the little brother of the beasts."

Sometimes Johnny stopped at a cabin in order to earn a few pennies by mending the housewife's tinware. Everyone welcomed him and children shouted with joy when they saw that



Fawns sometimes followed Johnny so he had to speak harshly to them to make them go back to their mothers

queer figure of his looming out of the woods as he came along up the wagon track between the tall rows of corn. Sitting at his work on the doorstep, he told them stories of the forest and the wild creatures living in it, and he helped the boys carve sleds or whistles of willow twigs.

But it was the little girls who were dearest to Johnny's heart. Maybe that was because very long ago Old Johnny had had a sweetheart. Pretty Sarah Crawford! He had loved her and she had died. She had died on their wedding day and been buried in her wedding dress. Then Old Johnny had taken his sacks and given up everything else to follow the vision of the angels and plant his seeds through the West. But he still carried pressed in his Bible, the petals of apple blossoms that Sarah had given to him in those far off happy days.

Always the old man could find somewhere in his big deer-skin sack a bit of bright-colored calico to give to a little girl. Then the little girl ran off and came back with her doll which was nothing more than a corncob having eyes, nose, and mouth painted on it, and a bunch of dried cornsilk for hair.

Sitting by Johnny's side, the little girl took the calico and sewed away very busily until the doll had a new dress.

At evening when the men came in from their work on the farm, Johnny went with them into the cabin where golden strings of corn, dried pumpkins, ham, and venison hung down from the rafters. As he took his place on the bench before the rude homemade table on which supper was laid for the family, he looked around very carefully to see there was food enough so the children could have plenty before he ate a bite himself. When the meal was finished at last and old and young sat together before the blazing hearth fire, he took his big Bible out and flung himself flat on the floor where the flickering light from the flames shone full on his rugged old face.

"Would you like a little news right fresh from heaven?" he cried. And opening his Bible he read the story and words of Jesus. Then with his knapsack under his head, he went to sleep on the floor and slept by the fire all night.

When people asked Johnny what they should give him to pay him for his trees, he said:

"Oh, give me a coat, an old pair of pants, or anything else you don't want."

In that way, as time went on, he collected the strangest clothes. In summer he went barelegged, dressed in his coffee sack, but in winter he might be seen in a ragged old army coat with a pair of pants having one leg a different color from the other. Or he might appear like a scarecrow clad in the long full skirt of a woman's Mother Hubbard dress. Instead of his mush-pan hat he often wore a cap with a vizor which he had made out of pasteboard and if he ever had shoes they were certain to be misfits, a boot perhaps on one foot and a moccasin on the other.

One cold winter day a neighbor saw Johnny with one foot bare and the other thrust into a shoe.

"Why in the world have you only one shoe?" asked the man.

"Good reason why, Hiram," said Johnny. "That bare foot stubbed his toe a day or so ago. I'm just punishing him for his stumbling!"

To make him look still more queer, Old Johnny was often seen followed by a lean gray wolf which he had nursed back to health when it had been hurt in a trap. Or maybe trailing at his heels would be a pet Billy goat which waited at the doors of stores or even before a church when Johnny went inside.

But in time as Johnny wandered, little towns sprang up in the once unpeopled Ohio. Schools and churches appeared where Johnny had tramped for years through age-old silent forests. Stagecoaches came to the West and the horn of the stagecoach drivers rang excitedly on the air as the horses dashed through a village and up to some little inn. Then Johnny felt his work here in this district was done. He must go further westward to keep ahead of the settlers in planting his appleseeds. So he visited all his friends and solemnly said farewell. Then he trudged off to Indiana where loneliness still

reigned and settlements of white men were still few and far between.

Down the old Indian trails he tramped through marshlands where hunters and trappers, collecting skins for the fur trade, lived on wooded islands above the rushes in the water. As he wandered the maze of paths that led through the Kankakee Marshes, he heard the hundreds of game birds call among the reeds or saw them take wing in a mass, making shadows flit over the grasses like a cloud flying over the earth.

Every spring in those swamp lands Johnny saw hordes of birds come tumbling out of the sky to summer on the marshes. Like a rolling, billowy cloud came the beautiful white swans. By thousands came wild duck and geese, the handsome blue heron which wades in the water, and the long-legged sand-hill crane.

Sitting quietly on the ground, Johnny watched with delight the absurd spring dance of the cranes when the cranes stood about in a circle as dignified as people, performing a stately dance that ended with a game of leap-frog.

When the wild geese were building homes on top of the little mounds that were the muskrat houses and tiny mallard ducklings went scrambling over floating nests, Old Johnny's heart was gay with the everlasting joy of springtime.

At night when the weary hunters came home with their faithful dogs after long hours in their boats among reed-clogged waterways, he sat with them by their campfire, sharing their evening meal and hearing tales of the day's adventures.

Often, too, in these marshlands, he fell in with horse thieves and robbers or makers of counterfeit money, for Big and Little Bogus Islands, rising from the great Black Marsh, were haunted by all kinds of outlaws. So well did Old Johnny know all the paths in that neighborhood that he found the hidden log road laid secretly under the water which led to the robbers' hideout on Little Bogus Island.

There he often came on horse thieves busily using their paint pots to change the color and markings of horses which

they had stolen. But he sat down and ate with horse thieves as readily as with hunters. Though he found himself at night with a band of desperate men under the gloomy trees of Little Bogus Island, he always stretched out by the fire after supper was over, took his big Bible out and cried:

“Would you like a little news fresh from heaven?”

Then he read about the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus. He read how on the cross they both repented of their deeds and entered by the side of Jesus into the glories of heaven.

Soon, as Old Johnny wandered up and down over the country, he saw little houses spring up on the flat lands of Indiana just as he had seen them rise on the green hills of Ohio. He saw the merry house raisings when a settler invited his neighbors to help him lay in place the logs he had cut for his cabin. In a single day the strong men, laughing and joking together, would have the cabin up. Then at sunset the housewife would spread a feast for the workers on a table under the trees.

Often Johnny dropped in at a cabin when the women were making merry with a huge quilt stretched on a frame, all working away at quilting. Or he stopped at the little log schoolhouse where the country folk were contesting in a noisy spelling match.

On winter evenings when the ground was powdered white with snow, Old Johnny would enter a barnyard that was filled with the jingle of sleigh bells. Out of sleigh after sleigh piled laughing men and women to help at a husking bee. Then Johnny took his place in the barn, with the people sitting in a circle around a pile of unhusked corn. Lanterns swinging from pitchforks stuck in the hay of the haymow, lit the merry faces of the group as they started husking at a great rate to see who could heap up before him the largest pile of golden ears. If a young girl found a red ear, every boy in the circle kissed her. And if a boy found a red ear, he kissed every girl in the room. When at last the husking was finished, there would come a shout from the house:

"Halloa there! Supper's ready!"

Then the huskers piled into the cabin where long tables had been set, groaning with the weight of their goodies. There were bear meat, wild turkey, venison, vegetables, cider, doughnuts, and mince and pumpkin pies. From the rafters dangled on strings big chunks of maple sugar from which each guest bit off what he wanted to put in his coffee.

Johnny was as merry as the merriest at one of these husking bees but he wouldn't eat a bite of meat. It wasn't in Johnny's heart to eat the wild things of the forest. Instead he hauled out of his bag a little handful of nuts or a bit of cold boiled mush which he ate while the others feasted.

When the tables were cleared away and the room was ready for dancing with the fiddler about to start in playing "Turkey in the Straw," the people always asked Johnny to sing them one of his songs. Then Johnny stood up before them in his ragged old coffee sack. Proudly holding a mug full of cider made from some of his apples, he sang with a lively gusto:

*"I love the golden apples that hang upon the tree,
Heigho, the apple tree is good enough for me!
Some folks like the peach tree, some folks like the cherry,
Some folks like the grape and wine to make them merry,
But give me rich ripe apples wherever I may be—
Heigho, the apple tree is good enough for me!"*

And now Old Johnny had planted so many trees in the West that he did not need to go back to Pennsylvania for seeds. His own orchards bloomed in spring in billowy pink and white masses that rippled over hills and prairies like soft piles of drifted snow. His nurseries were farm centers where settlers gathered from miles to get the little trees.

For nearly sixty years Johnny wandered the western trails from New York and Pennsylvania not only to Ohio and Indiana, but into Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, and Missouri.

When he was a very old man he started from his little cabin near Fort Wayne, Indiana, to make a farewell visit to all the

good friends he had met in planting his appleseeds. Sitting with a crowd of his cronies in some little village tavern he talked of the good old times, the house raisings, Indian battles, and escapades with bears and wolves. Then he trudged back to the spot where his sweetheart Sarah was buried. Standing for a long time silent, he thought of her and his love dreams and the long ago days of his youth.

"As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so was my beloved," he said very tenderly as he knelt and planted some seeds.

Soon neighbors saw flowers spring up, forming the words "Apple Blossoms" on the green grass of Sarah's grave.

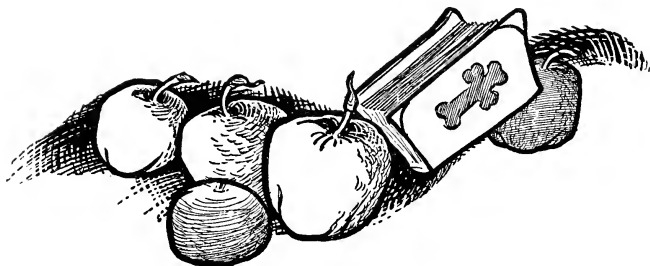
When Johnny was back home again, he walked a long way one day to repair the fence of a nursery which some cattle had broken down. For hours he worked on the place. He worked in the glory of the sunshine, in the silver sheen of the rain, and beneath the bright arch of a rainbow. The next day men passing in a wagon heard a feeble call. Running to see what had happened, they found Johnny lying helpless in the midst of his apple orchard.

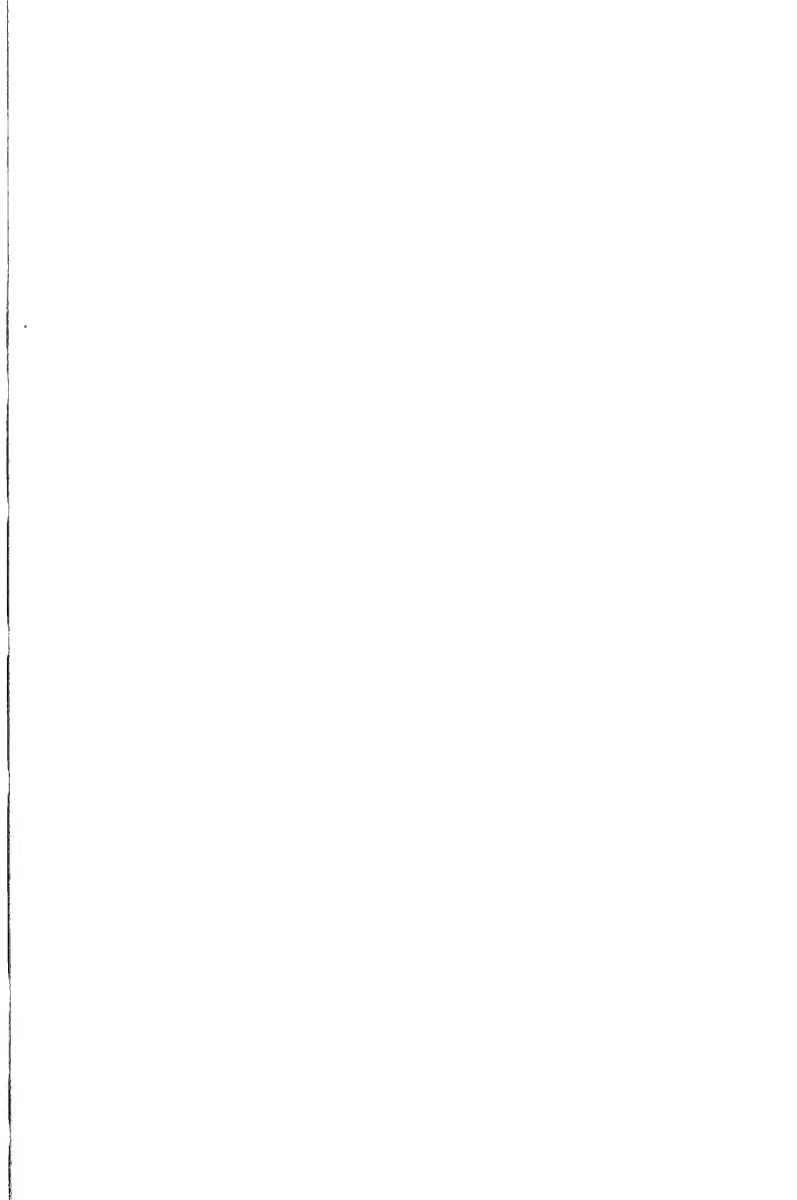
Sadly these men took Johnny and bore him to the nearest cabin which belonged to one of his friends. There he lay on the bed with his face turned toward the window. When the west began to glow with the golden light of the sunset, Johnny's face shone, too. His eyes lit with all the radiance that was in the western sky. Far off there he seemed to see the gleam of the Heavenly City with all its glittering orchards. On earth he had fulfilled the mission that had been given him. He had filled the face of the world with fruit. He had made the wilderness to be glad and to blossom like the rose. Now he would join the angels mid all the shining splendor of everlasting bloom.

So Old Johnny Appleseed died. Friends took his worn old Bible with the petals of Sarah's apple blossoms still pressed between the leaves and they placed it on his bosom. Then they laid Old Johnny in his grave on a farm not far from Fort Wayne.

In time the people who loved him put up at Ashland, Ohio, a monument to Johnny's memory and on the stone was engraved:

JOHNNY APPLESEED
PATRON SAINT OF AMERICAN ORCHARDS
AND
SOLDIER OF PEACE.
HE WENT ABOUT DOING GOOD.





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