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The "Hardshell".

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He was six feet tall, spare and straight. Indications suggested that his hair had originally been brownish, but his 55 years of life had faded out what color had been its, <sup>and</sup> sprinkled it with a yellowish tinge, so that its present color was not to be classed under any orthodox head. As to whiskers, he was and had always been clean shaven. No one ever saw a frown on his brow, or sadness on his front. His teeth set in many directions, and had never been brushed, filled or cleaned. The forty years he had chewed tobacco had (with other things) given them a merchaum brown color, and when he smiled, which was often, it made one think of ----- well, better not, perhaps.

The old fellow had 160 acres of land he had "taken up" from the government in early days, on which he lived in a "double-pen" house, constructed of logs notched in at the corners, and most of the cracks were covered with split boards. There were only two rooms; one at each end, with a covered way between. In one end the family cooked, ate, sat and lived; in the other they slept. The unceiled cracks (and there were many) were utilized for holding tools and hundreds of implements of life. A long Queen <sup>Annie</sup> musket of the flint lock vintage hung in two racks of wood over the mantle in the cook end of the house. The mantle was only a foot-wide plank resting on two wooden pins set into holes in a log of the wall. The floor had once been clean---when freshly sawed---but had been laid green and as the boards dried they shrank leaving cracks, now long ago filled with what old Julius Caesar called "spet" and other things. A half dozen dogs slept under this end of the house, and snored, snerled, fought and whined as in dreams they chased rabbits over



the hills or coons in the swamps. The wife was 50, grizzled of hair (what little she had), slab-sided, wrinkled, voluble, mean and emotional.

The children were nine in number, and went down like stair-steps, from the oldest, a tallow-faced, gangling girl of 22, to a tot of three years. In the matter of names Julius Caesar was both common-place and unique. Common-place in naming them; unique in never calling one by its true name. He gave each one such nick name as suited his untrained fancy. The oldest girl was named Martha----plain, Biblical Martha----but ~~they~~ called her "Pid". The oldest boy was named Mathew---plain and again Biblical--- and ~~they~~ called him "Bud". The next boy, named George Washington, ~~they~~ called "Coot". And so on down. How the old chap supposed a man could get on in life with "Coot" for a name has never been explained. Perhaps it never occurred to him that a name cut any ice beyond designating one fellow from the others.

The old fellow was a member of the Primitve Baptist Church (called "Hardshell" by the irreverent) whose faith is that all things were predestined before anything was made and they had to and would happen just the way they did happen.

I was quite a boy but it struck me that this was a singular faith, since those people labored, schemed, plotted and in fine seemed to live much like people of different faiths. They had churches and preaching, sang and prayed, like other denominations. One day I heard a neighbor, who was inquisitive like myself, get after Julius Caesar to explain. He never volunteered information as to religion or philosophy, but when interrogated he was never backwards in giving out "the light". His reply was this;

"You want to know, do ye? Its plain. God made the whole



job to onct. He didn't make the things right there then and leave the rest after to chance. He made the whole thing then, that is, He made what was there then and started the thing going so it had to make all the rest. He rit it down in the book of life before a thing happened. He rit that you and I were to be and we just had to be, both on us. You could not help it. You are not to blame for what you done; you just cant help it; it was rit before the world commenced that it was to be just so. What you do next year is also rit; it is all rit. You can't dodge it, no one can; it is rit and ~~if~~ you has to go that way, you may think you has a choice but you haint any choice; it was rit that you would want it that way. Why do we have churches and preach? Cant help it; He writ that also before He made anything. Why do we preach? I swan I dont know; dont think anybody else does but God. He may have a pint to it, but I shore ~~I~~ dont see it. That's God's business, not mine. You would not be to blame if you were to kick me, not in the least. It would be rit long ago that it should be that way, and agin, if I should take off my coat, as I would be likely to do, and larrup the stuffing out of you for it; that would be also rit. No, you cant dodge things. Why did I dodge when old Scoot shot at me? Could not help it; it was rit that way thousands of years before I was born. It didn't do a particle of good; but I had to do it. I confess that I cant see the sense in God making me dodge arter the bullet had gone past me, but He must have had some pint to it. Aint I afraid I will go to hell? No, I aint. It would do no good if I was. It has been rit and if rit that way down I goes and it cant be helped. God knows why, I suppose, but all that is none of my business and I dont propose to go nosing into God's affairs



that way. He made things; I didn't."

Every Sunday Julius Caesar hitched his old gray horse to a spring wagon and took his wife and the smaller children in it to church; the other children got there the best way they could. When contribution time came Julius Caesar just ran his hand into a pocket, grabbed what he found there and cast it into the hat. On various occasions it was an old knife, a string, a key or a lot of nails. Sometimes it was a small coin. The irreverant suggested that he always prepared that pocket with just what he wanted to give and mixed things up so as to make it appear that he never knew what was in that pocket. That was the only public comment that ever made the old fellow take notice; he angrily retorted, "Ding ye, if I did I couldn't help it; it was so rit".

James W. Oates.

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