

JOHN CHAPMAN

He worn a tin pot for a hat, in which
he cooked his supper
toward evening
In the Ohio forests. He wore
a sackcloth shirt and walked
barefoot on feet crooked as roots. And everywhere he went
the apple trees sprang up behind him lovely
as young girls.

No Indian or settler or wild beast
ever harmed him, and he for his part honored
everything, all God's creatures! thought little,
on a rainy night,
of sharing the shelter of a hollow log touching
flesh with any creatures there: snakes,
raccoon possibly, or some great slab of bear.

Mrs. Price, late of Richland County,
at whose parents' house he sometimes lingered,
recalled: he spoke
only once of women and his gray eyes
brittled into ice. "Some
are deceivers," he whispered, and she felt
the pain of it, remembered it
into her old age.

Well, the trees he planted or gave away
prospered, and he became
the good legend, you do
what you can if you can; whatever

the secret, and the pain,
there's a decision: to die,
or to live, to go on
caring about something. In spring, in Ohio,
in the forests that are left you can still find
sign of him: patches
of cold white fire.

---- Mary Oliver