

[Frederick Savage]

Old Yankee [Farmer?] and [?] 12/22/38 Mass 1938-9

STATE Massachusetts

NAME OF WORKER Christabel Kidder

ADDRESS Fitchburg, Massachusetts

SUBJECT Living Lore

NAME AND ADDRESS OF INFORMANT: Frederick Savage,

Harvard, Massachusetts

Mr. Frederick Savage of Still River, a part of Harvard , is eighty years old, but as strong and vigorous in appearance and manner as a man thirty years his junior. He is a handsome old man, tall, well-built with a keen eye that misses nothing, and a decisive manner tempered by a delightful sense of humour. Although his formal education stopped at the age of ten, Mr. Savage is a student, spending much of his time studying and reading. He is keenly interested in world and local affairs and is constantly writing diatribes on various and sundry subjects for the local papers. He has written and privately printed several books including the History of the Town of Harvard, where he spent his early life and where he has now returned after years of living in the West and South. He is a Yankee from way back and proud of it.

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There is nothing wishy-washy about Mr. Savage. He says what he thinks and says it with decision. There is no reluctance or fear on his part of expressing opinions and giving advice. He knows all the answers and doesn't mind telling you so. His favorite theme is the

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“good old days” which he thinks had it all over the present when life is lived too fast and in too much of a muddle.

Notwithstanding his decisive manner Mr. Savage is extremely personable. As a raconteur he has few rivals for his fund of anecdotes seem inexhaustible and his manner of telling the tales fascinating. He is a great letter writer and numbers among his correspondents some distinguished and well-known people. He is very friendly, and eager to make you at home. There is little difficulty in interviewing him for he just talks and talks and talks , not always on subjects desired, but anyhow he talks.

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Mr. Savage has had three wives. His present one is a native Californian, a dainty little creature with a soft voice and a gentle manner, who is completely dominated by her big husband. Her apologetic looks when “Frederick” cusses, only eggs him on to more frequent and more colorful phrases. At eighty and in the presence of his wife, Mr. Savage doesn't mind saying he likes the ladies and they like him. There's not a doubt that if the present Mrs. Savage were to follow her predecessors to the grave, Mr. Savage would be “on the market” for a fourth.

He tells you with a roar he prefers Californian or Southern women — “they're lots easier to handle and quieter” than the northern girls.

Name: Christabel Kidder

Title: Living Lore

Assignment: Harvard

Topic: A Yankee Roamer Speaks His Mind [Mr. Frederick Savage settled himself in a deep armchair and started to talk. There was little need to ask questions, and to attempt to guide the conversation was impossible. Mr. Savage wouldn't be “steered.” He said what

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he wanted to say, in the way he wanted to say it. His wife's various attempts to make him "conform" were brushed aside with bellows of impatience and the command to "quit jabbering and keep quiet."

He looked at me with keen eyes and announced.] "I can tell you the cause of this Depression. Don't know why everyone says, 'My, Goodness! How did this depression happen.' Easy to see how it came. Don't know why it didn't come sooner. In the first place I don't think that people today know the meaning of the word economy. At any rate, there's only a very few in the world who know how to practice it. The depression really began along in the early ninetenn nineteen hundreds when these damned unions began to form. Most of the men employed in / large manufacturing plants, including the railroads, joined in with some union so they could compel the companies they worked for to pay them higher wages. Right there, the good feeling was destroyed between the men that did the hiring and the men that worked for them. They commenced to have strikes, stand up strikes and sit down strikes. That wasn't good either for labor or for the owners of the mills, who had millions invested in their buildings and railroads. Both the laboring 2 man and the financier spent their time figuring how they could beat each other instead of having good feeling. The owners began to pay out their money for all kinds of new machinery to do away with having so many men working. Then, you see, there were more men to work than there was work for them to do.. And things kept getting worse..and the bad feeling kept getting worse. And, as I say, no one practises economy today. And people aren't self reliant the way they used to be. There's the damn story in a nutshell.

"Now there's lots of men who have the brains to think up plans, but they fail because they can't put them through. People are pleasure crazy today. A man lets his best thought-out-schemes come to nothing just because he puts them on one side because he wants to play golf or go to some fool shindig. I've travelled a lot in this country and I can tell you the majority of people are living beyond their income. They don't think they're living unless they have every damned thing hitched to them either by cash payment or the installment plan. When I was young, back in the sixties, there was no such thing as a 'standard of

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living.' Each man set his own standard of what he could afford in running his household or business. Course there were business failures once in a while but you didn't often hear of the average working man making a failure of life." [Mr. Savage paused for breath but before I could get a word in, he was off.]

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"In this modern age people think they're progressing but they're not. No sir, not by a damn sight. The people in the towns, the cities and the states ain't so well off financially, morally physically or mentally as they were in the sixties or seventies when common sense was used in regulating everything.

"Most people today are looking for someone to support them without work and if they keep that idea in their heads much longer most of us'll have to live in a cave or a dug-out or old shacks. A crust of bread and a handful of corn meal will look good to us. Work, work, work and hard work from sun-rise to sun-set, mixed with common sense, supports the people and the Government. And if they don't follow that rule, they're going soft and they'll decay. It ain't that human nature's changed much. Folks are just the same inside..just the same as when Adam met Eve in the Garden of Eden. It doesn't make any difference whether a woman wears wool, cottons or silk stockings, short or long dresses, hoop skirts or bustles or earrings, or diamonds, or has her dress held together with hooks and eyes or buttons or a lot of safety pins, she's just the same inside as she ever was. The only difference is she wants more because there's more in the world to want. The men are just the same, too. They all look, dress, and shave alike, their coats and pants and shoes and hats are all alike...but they want more, too. They don't want to work so hard and they want more for what they do.

"Children should be taught to be self-reliant but they ain't. And they ain't taught to mind, either. I've heard a lot of damn fool mothers bribe their children to be good with candy. They're rude, too. A child should be taught to be kind and considerate to his father and mother and all elderly people. Kind words to elderly people is like 4 candy to children.

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They appreciate it. Young people ought to remember that they'll be old, too, sometime. Most children are coddled too much and so they grow up expecting it. They ought to be made more self-reliant." [Mrs. Savage, as tiny and quiet as her husband is tall and loquacious, broke in with the remark, "Yes, self-reliance is really the answer to most of our problems, don't you think."

"Hell, no," her husband let out a bellow. "You got to have somethin' else.] You got to have honesty, too. Honesty in dealing pays better than trickery in the end. It's funny but the meanest trickster in the world gets by because he pretends he's honest. We can't get away from honesty. It's the standard of living today just as it always was. My grandfather, Captain Charles Tyler Savage always told me that no one can serve you as well as you can serve yourself, and that you've got to learn everything that you expect to know. I was taught to be truthful and self-reliant and all the people I ever worked for were. I went to work on a farm when I was ten years old at five dollars a month. I worked sixteen hours a day, from four in the morning till eight at night and I never thought I was abused. In August, when I was twelve, I went to Akron, Ohio to / work. I farmed and I was a chore boy in a hotel, worked in a flour mill nailing headliners on flour barrels, I did some surveying, too and worked in a stone quarry. I got a dollar a day for that and paid three and a half for board and room. Then I was in the hack driving business and then I went to Northfield as foreman on a large stock and tobacco farm. I've been a teamster and fired boilers and run steam derricks. All hard work but I liked it. For how long?

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A man today would think he was killed if he worked as hard as I did... but what I'm getting at by all this, is that no one I ever worked for expected anyone to help them out of a tough spot. Men and women, worked hard, made long days and each and everyone of them had learned by hard experience that if they got stuck in the mud or a snowdrift they had to dig themselves out or they could stay there. The Government wasn't cuddling people and giving to them and making them spineless then. In 1870 the farmers in Ohio had a wonderful crop of wheat. And they needed every cent they could get. They worked hard.

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Even the women and children cutting and setting up the wheat in stocks of twelve bundles each.

Then came most two weeks of rainy weather. The whole crop was almost a total loss for every kernel of wheat had a sprout on it. They never asked or expected the Government or anyone else to help them out. In 1873, when I was in Akron working on a large farm the crops were entirely eaten up by grasshoppers. They even ate the cotton lining all out of my vest when I left it on a rail fence. Not a farmer thought of the Government helping him out. In 1876 I was working on a large tobacco farm in Northfield, Massachusetts, side of the Connecticut river. The man I worked for had sixteen acres. He kept four men by the month and several more by the day. It cost a lot of money to raise and care for and fertilize sixteen acres of tobacco. It was already to harvest in one or two days. Then came a hail storm and every leaf of that tobacco was riddled. The loss was ten thousand dollars but the man took it and didn't expect the Government to help him. " [Mr. Savage paused, then pounding the table dramatically, shouted,] "There's just three things that make men great, intuition, honesty and initiative and our Government has taken those virtues away from millions of laboring men and from thousands of business men. Now you take this Social Security thing and the Old Age Pension. It ain't right. It'll take all the initiative and git-up-and-git out of young folks. If they know they'll have something to lean on when they're old, they won't work and believe me, a man who doesn't work for it, shouldn't get it.

"There's an old saying that a man is the architect of his life and believe me, it's the truth. For a long contented life, first of all you have to work hard, be honest, honest to yourself, toward others and to God. The success of life isn't just accumulating the almighty dollar, but to be independent and able to look every man in the face and say, 'I don't need anybody's help. I can do it myself.' That's what's the matter with the young people today. They can't do it and they don't seem to care.

"But Frederick there's a great many people today who can't help being in the position they're in. It isn't their fault if they're out of work and have to depend on others. We should

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be sorry....” little Mrs. Savage's quiet refined voice was drowned out by a blast from her husband.

“Hell, who said I wasn't sorry for them. Course I'm sorry for the poor fools. I don't mean its their fault — that is not 7 entirely. They just didn't use their heads getting tied up with unions and crying for government aid. I don't believe in unions — never saw any good in 'em and never belonged to one in my life. And Hell, I don't believe in the Government feeding the men and their families when they're out of work by their own will. It's got so no man can sell his labor for what its worth without joining a union. You hear a lot of talk about things being un-American. By God, that's un-American if anything is. And it's un-American for Washington to be telling the business men what to do and how to do it. America isn't a free country anymore like it was when I was young and when people not only supported themselves but the Government too. I tell you if a man will work and not avoid it and will economize, he'll get along. “ Let me tell you about my aunt Lucy Bancroft Thatcher. She was a widow and boarded with my grandfather, Captain C. T.

Thatcher for many years. She was fine woman and liked by everybody. She had a big correspondence and wrote hundreds of letters every year and never bought even one envelope. She used to open the envelopes she received very carefully , turn them wrongside out and paste them together with glue and have them all ready to put her letters in to send away. No one ever saw her use a match to light a lamp or a candle.

She made lamp lighters out of her old letter twisting them into little short sticks. She kept a stack of them on the mantle in the parlor and in the kitchen.

“You don't find such women today. Sometimes I figure they're getting crazier every year. Now you take a woman moving into a new house.

Ninety-nine out of a hundred wouldn't think of moving into a house unless it has hard wood floors. Then what do they do — Hell, 8 they rush out like the devil's after them to buy fancy rugs to cover the floors all up. And they're always bellowing about lots of air and sunshine

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and then they put draperies up and pull down the shades for fear the sun'll fade the-rugs and the curtains. Hell! And they all belong to a lot of clubs where they're supposed to do a lot of intellectual talking and listening and what do they do when they get home. Discuss the latest world situation or how to bring up their kids? Not on your life. The damn fools can only tell you what some other woman had on and how they wish they could have the same thing.

“You know what, [“Mr. Savage leaned forward holding my eye with a scorching look and dropping his voice lower, pronounced solemnly.] “ What this world needs is more thought of God. I was born in Northfield, the same town as Dwight Moody. I heard him preach when I was seventeen. He said it was good for a man to walk with God and I've always remembered it. I try to live right each day look to God for guidance. I tell you you may be smart enough to fool people but you can't fool yourself or God, for he's given each one of us a conscience, and for your own good and the good of others, use it.

“Travel made / me see God much clearer than I ever did before. Only a great Power that we can't comprehend could make the Grand Canyon or Mount Power. When I used to sit up on the cliff in the Mission Hill Garden and see the Pacific all so blue and look up Mission Valley for some forty miles and across the valley to the mountains — I knew there was a God and he was a good God. I sit for hours sometimes and think 9 of God — and I'm thankful for his Loving care and know that His hand in everywhere.” [Mr. Savage's rapid transition from dogmatic blustering to this solemn thoughtfulness left us gasping. Before we could collect our wits, a neighbor drove into the yard with a load of wood. In an instant Mr. Savage was on hip feet and out the door swearing a streak. Mrs. Savage running after him with a warm coat and hat was lost in the bedlam. The interview was apparently over for this time.]