

VIGNETTES FROM A RURAL LIFE HISTORY:  
A PROLOGUE TO MY SOCIOLOGICAL STEWARDSHIP\*

by

Carroll D. Clark  
University of Kansas

Wherein I trace something of my origins as town boy, farm boy, and school boy, with an aim to making it clear to the reader how it came to pass that even though born and reared a WASP, it was my fate to become a marginal man. Besides which are discussed certain misadventures affecting my physical appearance, mental attitudes, and idiosyncrasies, particularly those which may have served in some measure to stultify my life chances.

I

I was born January 10, 1898, in the town of Minneapolis, Kansas, a county seat of about 2,000 people then and not much larger today. It lies in the heart of the Solomon Valley, a fertile alluvial wheatland. Both my grandfathers settled there in the early days. Grandpa Clark, a four-year Civil War Veteran (12th Illinois Cavalry), became a physician after the war and brought his family to Minneapolis in 1873. There he lived until his death in 1922. The very archetype of the pioneer "horse-and buggy doctor," he had treated perhaps half the inhabitants and delivered a large quota of the babies born in that community before the end of the century. I happened to be one of those who came into the world with him in attendance.

My maternal grandparents, Grandpa Chapin and wife, came to Ottawa County by covered wagon from Iowa in 1878 and bought a farm six miles south of Minneapolis. The land was poor and times were hard for farmers. In three years they moved to town where Grandpa and a brother started a drayage-transfer business in the early Eighties. This must have prospered for they branched out in other enterprises including a mill and grain elevator at Delphos, a village in the northwest part of the county. Grandpa Chapin had seven children of whom my mother was the oldest.

My father was born near Rockford, Illinois, shortly before his folks moved first to western Missouri, then two years later to Kansas. He became a member of the first class to graduate from Minneapolis High School and was then sent to the University of Kansas where he prepared for the Kansas City Homeopathic College in Kansas City, Missouri. After obtaining his M.D. he returned to Ottawa County to begin practice in the village of Ada. When I was born he had moved to Minneapolis and joined his father.

Some of my earliest memories are associated with the big adjoining offices Dad and Grandpa occupied above the bank in which the latter was an officer. Also I recall rides in the dog-cart with Grandpa or in the box-buggy with my Dad to call on rural patients. When weather was stormy Dad could enclose his buggy with a tarpaulin front having an isinglass window to see through and a slot for the reins; also side curtains. I loved these rides and the visits with farm folk who often gave me a treat such as home-made bread and jelly.

People used to debate whether the "young Doc Clark" or the "Old Doc" was the better; many had "doctored" with both. Years later I heard it said that Grandpa had never lost a patient with "inflammation of the bowels" (appendicitis) except when called in to take over, at a critical stage, a patient under treatment by another doctor. Since the mortality rate from this disease was then high, no doubt this claim was an exaggeration, but the "Old Doc" combined homeopathy with the shrewd empirical knowledge of a long general practice and must have had unusual success. He would never purge his patients with strong cathartics, a common therapy in those days. Dad was said to be more "eclectic" than Grandpa but in the main he followed the same tenets.

An "eclectic," as I came to know, was supposed to be a doctor who did not follow in doctrinaire fashion the teachings of either of the two rival schools of medicine then in strong contention (at least locally), homeopathy and allopathy. The teachings of homeopathy held that medicines such as induce effects in a well person similar to the symptoms of the disease can, if prescribed in small doses, aid in curing that disease. The part of this doctrine emphasized by both "Doc" Clarks was the small dosage; they would tell you in private that over-medication by allopaths had poisoned many a sick person. I grew up thinking allopaths were a bad lot.

The consensus even among blood relatives who might have been partial was to the effect that I was an exceedingly homely baby. Indeed, my own mother confided many years later that on first viewing me, her first born, she feared she had brought the world some sort of freak, or her own babe might have been switched for a changeling. Why I was so unattractive as an infant I can not imagine, since my parents were regarded as a fine looking couple and the three brothers and a sister who were born later were all perfect little cherubs as babies. None of this bothered me at the time, as everyone in the family doted on me, and outsiders were too polite to comment openly. But as I neared adolescence, I took to brooding considerably about my physical appearance. This was the more painful as standards of invidious comparison were introduced not only by the cherubic siblings, but by cousins, neighbor kids and school rivals.

When I was two and a half years old, a mishap befell me not calculated to help my unfavored physiognomy. My father was cleaning a cistern just outside the kitchen door. He had descended to the bottom of the cistern, about 18 feet deep, presumably to remove toads, garter snakes or other small animals that had a habit of falling in and fouling the water. Or the bad odor of the water Mother complained about might have come from sparrows nesting in the gutters.

Suddenly I rushed out of the backdoor, fell in headlong, hurtling down upon poor Dad. He was standing on a ladder just above the water line. Though startled half out of his wits, Dad partially broke my fall. He probably saved me from getting a broken neck. However, my face was bashed in - nose and jaw broken - either by striking the wall of the cistern or the ladder; I never knew which. In fact, I never could recall the accident at all, but remember long afterwards how relatives and family friends talked about it. I made a good conversation piece. They joined my parents in lamentations over my nose which remained slightly askew, and my lower jaw which became receding as it mended, with no dental occlusion on the left side. Often I heard it said, "How fortunate he isn't a girl!" Others remarked, "Lucky for him he didn't fracture his skull or drown!" There have been times I've wondered whether they were right or wrong on either

or both of these speculations. Certainly, as I've since learned, such matters depend largely on one's point of view. A girl's life isn't reputed to be all beer and skittles even though she is a beauty queen; as for sudden death before the dawn of consciousness, it doubtless might have saved me a deal of nuisances and worries. Still even those existentialist thinkers who rate life down, generally admit it has its moments, and as we shall see, I have had mine.

Several events that promised to be even more calamitous began unfolding. Before my consciousness had a chance to awaken or I had managed to progress through that complex process social psychologists call developing a "social self" -- (Freudians refer to it as a "superego") -- our cozy familial life was disequibrated. To put the matter more concretely, the first of the cherubic brothers previously mentioned began to annoy me. I apparently took no cognizance of his arrival when I was two years old. But later folks would refer to my nose being broken. I naturally supposed that referred to the cistern accident. By the time I was four, however, I realized I had a rival whose cunning ways were displacing me from the center of attention. When no one was watching I used to snatch toys away from this interloper just to make him yell.

The other event affected every member of my family; its consequences changed the lives of all of us. My father's health began to fail. Never regarded as rugged, he now gradually reached a state that verged on semi-invalidism. When I was grown and had a family of my own, I tried to learn from my mother and from relatives or others who were in a position to know, what it was that brought on the insidious decline that nipped the "Young Doc's" promising professional career in the bud. By far the commonest answer was that his eye-sight failed to a point that forced him to give up his practice. This certainly was a factor in his difficulties; perhaps considering his frustration and loss of self-confidence, it was the only factor that really counted.

Nevertheless, I often have wondered as I observe handicapped people who persist in their calling by adapting ingeniously to overcome whatever obstacles their condition presents, why my Dad gave up as he did. Despite weak, often ulcerated, and badly scarified eyes, he continued to read omnivorously from books, magazines and newspapers of ordinary print as long as he lived. He used a large magnifying glass, for eye glasses did not suffice. When his eyes became too weak for him to read with one glass, he would bind two together with adhesive tape and go on reading. Perhaps he sought an escape from a profession he never really liked. Maybe he was tacitly pressured into it by indulgent but strong-willed parents and a community of folks whose ready-set expectations grooved him into the role they thought the son of "Old Doc" ought to play. I have my theory about all this now, but I never succeeded in learning for sure why the highly respected "Young Doc," after treatment prescribed by several eye specialists failed, gave up his practice so readily.

Early in the spring of 1903, my family moved to a farm three and one-half miles south of Minneapolis. It was owned by my Grandma Clark who had bought it some twenty years before, I presume with funds from her share of her father's estate. The land was obtained from the Union Pacific Railroad at a price of only two or three dollars an acre. There were 400 acres in this farm, about one fourth of which was bottom land and nearly half in upland pasture. A house and three barns had been built on the place many years before we moved in, and tenants had lived there. The house was enlarged to provide three bedrooms; running water from a large tank near the windmill was piped into the kitchen; and other improvements were made just before or soon after we occupied the place.

So it came about that from my fifth year until I left home at the age of 18, I lived on the farm. It was expected that by renting out the tillable land on shares and raising some livestock, my folks could make a good living there. Also, farm life was counted on to help my Dad's eye-sight, and improve his general health. For a time things did seem to improve. Soon we had a flock of Plymouth Rock chickens that freely roamed the yard, several cows were in the feedlot near the milkshed, and a small herd of beef cattle were grazing in the Big Pasture (so-called to distinguish it from the smaller North Pasture). We had a large black dog named Tobe, that devotedly followed my brother and me wherever we roamed in our play; he would pounce on snakes and shake them violently as he chewed them to death; then he would vomit. One was a rattlesnake with six rattles and a button. Dad also had a team of work horses and kept the carriage horse formerly used for his calls on patients. In a year or so he bought a saddle pony that I soon learned to ride.

That farm possessed many natural features that appealed to growing boys. The house and out-buildings were on a hill, with large cottonwood trees to shade the yard and an apple orchard edged with a shelter-belt of ash, box-elder and hackberry trees to attract birds. In the Big Pasture was a much larger hill (called naturally the "Big Hill"), the highest for miles around, with a steep rocky face on the north from which you had a magnificent outlook across the Solomon Valley. Below, a deep ravine threaded its way diagonally across the farm on its way to Salt Creek. Several dams had been built to make ponds well stocked with catfish and sun perch.

My second brother was born not long after we moved to the farm. Dad's only sister, who lived at Belleville, had one child, a son near my age. Cousin Willie Perry usually spent part of each summer with us. Neighbor farm boys would join us also, making a lively gang for fishing, swimming, riding and climbing the Big Hill. When I was nine Dad helped us build a boat for the ponds, and the next year bought a wall tent for us to camp in. About the same time we were allowed to have Benjamin pump air rifles which shot accurately and would kill small game.

A veritable recreation center was the Big Barn. It was built in the Eighties by Grandpa Clark shortly after Grandma acquired the farm. Picture a huge structure erected on a slope that made possible two levels, the lower providing a basement of sandstone masonry of a size to shelter fifty head of cattle; the upper level a hay loft with a driveway permitting a team and hayrack to enter and unload. Grandpa had built this barn like the Mormon Temple, with mortise-and-tenon joints for the heavy beams and no nails except for the siding and roofing. We could climb the beams and rafters, high dive down into the hay, swing by the ropes leading from the pulleys to the overhead track of the mechanical hay fork, and clamber along the feeding rack down in the basement. Also we liked to shoot pigeons in the loft, getting a bounty for killing them because they fouled the hay. The squabs were good eating, besides.

A decision of great importance for the life chances of us children was made when I was six. My folks made up their minds that they would send us to the town school in Minneapolis instead of the country school. The farm was taxed in a rural district to support a one-room, one-teacher school in Pawnee Gap, a mile and a half from us, and it was supposed by nearly everyone I would go there. There was a tuition fee to attend the town school because we were outside that district. Nevertheless, my parents and grandparents were agreed it was worth the extra expense to give us boys the advantages of the Minneapolis school system. For this I have always been grateful. During that first year or so my dad would drive me to town Sunday and I would stay at Grandpa Clark's until the folks drove in to market as they always did Fridays or Saturdays.

When I was only eight, cows began to play a part in my life that was to continue until I left the farm. I learned to milk. In fact, I soon became a faster milker than Dad. The next year Dad added several more cows and encouraged my brother to learn to milk also. No longer did we stay during the school week at Grandpa's, since now we were needed for chores at the farm. We learned to drive a horse and single buggy, though for several years we often shared a ride with a neighbor's boys.

I am tempted to dwell at length on the influence that a bunch of bovines can exert on a person's destiny. Doubtless it is different in this era of milking machines, self-feeders, and other automatic devices of the modern dairy, but in those days milchcows had to be hand milked. They also had to be fed, herded, cleaned up after, and kept fenced in. When she calved, the cow had to be cared for to make sure the after-birth was cleaned out, the calf had to be snubbed away from its mother and taught to drink from a bucket, the cow's chapped or sore teats had to be treated with salve, measures had to be taken against mange, warbles, various kinds of flies, and so on, almost ad infinitum.

Taking on a cow is not like taking on a job at the drugstore or supermarket after school hours. You practically marry that cow; with us boys as we grew older and Dad kept enlarging the herd, you might say we had a whole harum on our hands. Now it meant rising at 4:30 or 5:00 a.m., cleaning out the cow-shed, fetching the cows from pasture or basement of the Big Barn, locking them in their stanchions, milking, turning the De Laval cream separator, feeding the calves, putting hay or fodder in the feedracks; then our breakfast to bolt down, the team to harness and hitch to the surrey, a quick wash-up and change from work clothes to school clothes, and off to school, nearly a four mile ride over dirt roads! Many are the times I've reflected on the level of scholarship I might have attained if the hours devoted to cows might have been spent on studying foreign languages, reading good literature, and cultivating the life of the mind one way or another.

Yet through these years I was actually rather fond of our cows, whose personalities were nearly as distinctive as are those of people. Also I became vain of my skill as a fast milker. There were months when the work load on the farm required the services of a hired hand, who would of course live in, and help with chores. One such fellow had a reputation as a speedy milker. My brother, "Shorty," did some bragging on my behalf with the result a contest was run to see whether I could outdo the fellow. I knew my cows. I defeated this hired man. But it now occurs to me that he was probably not going all out to win. The reward for best milker was merely more cows to milk.

On top of going to school in town five days a week for nine months of the year, my mother insisted that we drive in to Sunday School and Church services. Grandpa Chapin's family were all devout church members; in fact, he was a direct descendant of Deacon Samuel Chapin, the 17th Century subject of Augustus Saint-Gauden's statue, "The Puritan," that stands in Springfield, Massachusetts. True to his heritage, Grandpa was Superintendent of our Sunday School, for many terms served as an Elder in the Church, and also taught a young married women's class. But this did not reconcile me to the travail ordained by my mother. She would get us up betimes every Sunday. Then after doing chores, we drove to town as on any school day to attend church services. For me it usually meant a good forenoon frittered away listening to the dull moral homilies dispensed by the teacher of the Junior Boys' Class.

My brothers as well as I, and indeed most of the other fellows, lacked enthusiasm for those long spiritual exercises, which made us all feel guilty, no doubt. For myself, I knew all too well my sins were many and I needed to get to work on them and try to weed the worst of them out of my system. But somehow, I found Sunday School only made me more willful and rebellious. Finally, I relaxed and faced the Sabbath ordeal in "quiet desperation."

Fairly often the preacher and his wife would be invited to Sunday dinner at Grandpa Chapin's and occasionally out to our farm for a meal. The menu would be especial, usually featuring roast chicken or capon, and in season either turkey or duck. I clearly recall how a certain preacher, after saying grace, would be asked what part of the fowl he preferred. He would always answer, with the complacent air of a man who had been over that ground many times before and was accordingly familiar with his rights, "If you please, just a little of the breast." And his portion was not only breast but a particularly thick slice, even though it might mean a shortage, with only necks, wings, and "the part that went over the fence last" for us youngsters.

After dessert, usually consisting of homemade pie or cake or both, this reverend would belch audibly, thinly disguising it with his hand. I have heard that some heathen tribes use this gesture to compliment their host on the refection, so a preacher could have come to follow this custom while doing a tour of duty as a missionary. It was tabooed in our family, but always overlooked on the part of this minister. I had some questions I wanted to raise with him, -- questions beginning to bother me about Calvinist theology, such as predestination and infant damnation. Once I tried, but must have phrased my questions poorly, as I didn't succeed in getting a satisfactory answer. Grandpa and Grandma Chapin always hoped one of us boys would be inclined toward the ministry, but we all chose other vocations.

## II

Driving to school in town, in horse-and-rig, five times a week whether fair weather or foul, nine months of the year over poorly graded dirt roads which turned into a quagmire in wet spells and shrouded horse, buggy and passengers in thick clouds of dust during dry periods, -- all this, I submit, was not the easiest way to get an education. In winter the trip might take more than an hour. The road at times was all but impassable owing to snow drifts or a frozen mud surface that mired horse and buggy down till we stalled. Then we would have to pile out while all but the driver heaved to, and tramped through drifts and pushed the buggy. "School clothes" would get mud-splattered or soiled with thick dust, yet my folks would never hear of us wearing overalls and farm boots to school as was done by many. I didn't mind the ride on nice days especially after my second brother, "Click," reached school age, making it necessary at times for us to drive a team and the surrey. This shortened the ride and we never got stuck in mud or snow, though there were sometimes blizzards with wind-borne sleet the horses wouldn't face. On several occasions like that we were compelled to go back home or seek refuge at a neighbor's farm.

If there is a topic more certain thoroughly to bore most young people on the sunny side of the generation gap than the one I've just been dwelling on, I have

yet to find it. All references to such hardships as we ancients claim we endured in getting ourselves an education, a job, and whatever worldly goods we've succeeded in acquiring, leave them cold. For this reason and on the assumption some of the young out of curiosity may chance to peruse this document, I shall go light on the tougher aspects of this period and point no moral. One effect of the prolonged exposure to dust upon my upper respiratory system, however, requires comment, since it had a definite bearing on my eventual flight from the farm to seek a white collar vocation.

The dust-borne trouble I make reference to was nosebleed. Upon arriving at Grandpa Clark's place after a dusty ride, I would always wash up, blow the blackish mucus from my nostrils, and clear the viscid phlegm from my throat. (We always stabled our horses in Grandpa's barn, which stood well to the back of his yard. Much of the time we also ate a hot noon day meal Grandma prepared for us.) One day after a particularly nasty ride owing to a southerly breeze that kept a choking cloud of dust surrounding us during the entire trip to town, my nose, when I tried to clean it, started bleeding. From that day until I left the farm in 1961 some eight or nine years later, I was plagued with sporadic periods of nose-bleeding. For weeks my nose would bleed without rhyme or reason, defying all remedies prescribed by doctors, or derived by well-wishers from folklore.

"Old Doc" thought my ailment might stem from hay fever, but he also was suspicious of my tonsils and adenoids. When his homeopathic doses failed, he finally went so far as to recommend that I be sent to see a doctor in the city reputed to be a nose, eye, ear and throat expert. This was new to Grandpa who did not accept the doctrine that a patient should be divided into parts and farmed out to experts on the parts with scant regard to relevant information concerning the whole. But Grandpa became so concerned he was willing to bend on his wonted principles and methods if it would halt that leaky nose of mine.

Unless my memory plays me false, the year was 1907 or maybe 1908, and this trip was made in my Grandpa Chapin's motor vehicle. He had owned one since around 1902, when his family lived in Delphos. I'm not sure of the make of that first car, but it was a two cylinder, chain-drive job, probably a Locomobile or Oldsmobile. This car had been disposed of prior to 1905 when the Chapin family moved back to Minneapolis. When we made the trip to see the nose expert, I think Grandpa drove a sleek Buick runabout; at any rate about that time the Chapins owned their first Buick. They decorated it with homemade artificial flowers one year and entered it in the Ottawa County Fair contest winning a prize.

Well, the car was new, Grandpa Chapin was new at the controls, and the road was so new it resembled a cowpath the first thirty miles or so. Perhaps I should mention that "Old Doc" Clark did not accompany us, -- he remained distrustful of horseless carriages, refusing ever to own one and not even deigning to ride in one of the "fool contraptions" until about 1913. On the contrary, Dad was keen on cars; however, he did not accompany us on this particular journey.

Except for a minor mishap, the trip, as car trips figured then, was uneventful and pleasant enough. We made good time despite getting marooned once on a hogback. Simply by filling the ruts with debris we soon managed to get off. While I was scrounging the roadside and a nearby pasture for rocks, rotted fence posts and other debris, a red bull sauntered toward me. It would improve this yarn if I could describe how this sire lowered his gnarled head, charged, and

gave me a close run for my life. But that did not happen on this occasion, though something similar did occur more than once later on. Grandpa had noticed the bull's approach and warned me in plenty of time. I beat a retreat through the fence.

The mishap referred to occurred as I crawled through that barbed-wire fence, perhaps a bit more hurriedly than circumstances necessitated. My fondness for cows did not extend to bulls. Barbed wire, I should add, is nasty stuff to traverse, as the boys in the trenches were to learn a few years later. In my haste I ripped a big hole in the seat of my pants, and scratched my rump painfully. Of course I had brought no other pants with me, so had to be embarrassed by the unsightly rent while in the city. The scratch became infected in a day or so after our return home, making it next to impossible for me to sit on a milk-stool.

The interview with the nose doctor was disappointing. We found him quite willing to accept "Old Doc's" diagnosis, putting the blame on tonsils and adenoids, after he made what seemed to me a very cursory inspection of my nose and throat parts. Then he made an astonishing offer, namely to cut out the tonsils and adenoids then and there, using some sort of local anesthetic. Grandpa Chapin appeared taken aback by this unexpected proposal, thus leaving the decision to me. I emphatically vetoed it. I was not wholly unfamiliar with surgical instruments, but never had I seen such a disquieting assortment of lancets and other cutting tools as were blatantly displayed in a tall glass-fronted case in this doctor's office. I was convinced that he was an allopath of a knife-happy type and not to be trusted.

We left, saying it would be necessary to consult my parents. On our return I found Dad was not inclined to push the matter. The infected scratch earned me an unexpected bonus for I was permitted to stay in town with the grandparents a whole week while the "Old Doc" treated and healed my wound.

As for the nosebleed, it continued to pester me off and on, but to a diminishing degree after I entered high school. I have my own theory about what caused it. This was before the age of allergies, of course, but I suspect I was allergic to road dust heavily charged with the pulverized horse and mule dung such as I often had to breathe. This would bring on violent sneezing fits and may have led to an ulcerated condition in the upper nasal passages. As time passed, roads improved; our conveyances speeded up, and the exposure to dust lessened. Then, pari passu, my nose condition improved. After I left the farm I never was troubled with the least nasal hemorrhage, even during severe dust storms while living, as I later did, in southwest Kansas.

My theory I recognize is the untested conjecture of a mere layman. Nevertheless it has always aggravated me to have doctors smirk condescendingly whenever I try to suggest that my nose problem was based on horse and mule dung.

### III

I entered the grade school at Minneapolis in January, 1904 the beginning of the spring semester. The building was a large brick structure, two stories high and constructed according to a design resembling a thick four leaf clover. Each leaf of the clover housed one class on the first floor and another on the second. Offices of superintendent, janitor and school board were wedged in between clover leaves. School supplies, furnaces, and coal filled the basement.

High school classes also met in a second-floor room until, because of increasing enrollment, a special high school was erected in 1905. However, before 1903 only once had more than a dozen high school students graduated in a year. The total population of school age was about 700, but perhaps as many as 200 of these did not attend school.

This grade school was not wholly new to me since various public and even a good many private events were held there, some of which I had attended when we had lived in town - a few even after we moved to the country. I recall delightful performances by troupes of mandolin and zither players - curious instruments again featured today; and a few excellent male and female choruses. These may have been glee clubs from colleges of the State. But at other times there were dull talks, I presume by office-holders or public figures unwilling or unable to pay the fee at the opera house, or denied the courthouse because district court was in session. The grade school had no auditorium but as many as one hundred people could crowd into a classroom; more might stand in the adjoining cloakroom.

Few incidents during my first three years of school seem sufficiently noteworthy to be recorded here. The presence of so many youngsters assembled under one teacher overawed me at the outset but I soon got used to it. I had gone to a small private kindergarten our last year in town, and there had already studied the 3-R's as taught in the first grade, a fact that put me ahead. Certainly by no stretch of the imagination could I be categorized as precocious. But he who has mastered by rote one 3-R lesson is ready to move on to something else, and incessant drill can become monotonous.

Nevertheless, I seldom if ever became bored in grade school. The teachers were mostly good, all being conscientious if not dedicated. The music program was exceptional, at least for small-town schools of that period. Most significant of all, perhaps, was the ever-present "A" class to keep my wits from wool-gathering. I shall devote myself to the last-named topic here, postponing a discussion of the others until later sections.

To understand my reference to the "A" class, one must know something about what I propose to call, for want of a better term, the "dualistic principle" of curricular organization of the common branches. Today as extinct as the proverbial dodo, it flourished in the Minneapolis grade school and no doubt many others at the time I attended.

As previously noted, each leaf of the clover housed two of the eight grades, one on each floor. Each grade was further divided into halves, pupils of one half entering in September while those of the other half entered in January. For a semester they shared the same room and the same teacher. The fall enrollees began as a "B" class, but in January, all who passed became the "A" class of that grade. In other words, each of the grade teachers taught two halves of their grade concurrently every semester. I have struggled to put this matter lucidly, but somehow the trick escapes me. Any professor of educational sociology can explain it to the puzzled reader sufficiently interested to pursue the matter further. For me, this dualistic plan was easier to fall into than to describe, and once in it, I found myself stuck with it. Personally I think it served me ill in the long run, but in the short run it did provide certain advantages, which in all fairness should receive mention.

Chief of these was the opportunity, while a "B," to tune in on the "A's." My case may not have been typical, but I must attest that I found the pabulum spooned out to the "B's" slightly stale. In contrast, subject matter of the "A's" was not infrequently fresh and at best genuinely interesting. By the time one became an "A," the "B" lessons of course had become warmed-over fare, but if so inclined, one could slip a dime novel (or a Horatio Alger, Jr., opus which cost 35¢) inside a textbook, or watch the cut-ups around him misbehave while the teacher remained preoccupied with instructing the lesser half, the "B's."

Another advantage lay in the greater freedom and initiative allowed both the diligent learner and the mischievous non-learner. Both may have profited in their undertakings by not having a teacher constantly breathing down their necks. This point, I grant, is disputable, but most educational theories are like that.

Those vanishing Americans who once attended the little one-room country school with pupils ranging from six to sixteen years old, widely distributed over eight grades, and all taught concurrently by one teacher, -- they and only they can fully appreciate what I'm talking about. If they came out of the hub-bub with a modicum of learning -- and many with a good potential did -- it must have been largely owing to the strong stimulation to their curiosity and imagination by the activities of the grades ahead. Such a school was less like Upton Sinclair's "goose-step" than an old-fashioned game of hop scotch.<sup>a</sup>

Unfortunately, this dual plan suffered one disadvantage that eventually proved a serious set back. The off-beat starters who, like myself, went on to finish high school, could not graduate therefrom in four years. Unless we skipped a half-term class, or fell back a semester, or took a whole term vacation, we were bound to remain on a calendar, not a school-year basis. Even the federal income tax law permits its victims freely to shift from a calendar to a fiscal year. We had no such option, -- once we entered grade school in mid-year, we were fated to enter high school as sub-freshmen. Alas, the high school did not follow the dualistic scheme employed in the grades.

The so-called sub-freshman class arose as an expedient to take care of this discrepancy. However, like so many inventions in the sphere of social institutions, it merely postponed rather than solved the individual's problem. Once you got started on the off-beat you stayed there, unless you were a skipper, a retreator, or a drop-out. I was not smart enough for the first nor quite dumb enough for the third of these categories; accordingly, after postponing my decision until my sub-senior term, I beat a strategic retreat together with a majority of my off-beat classmates, and we graduated with the class behind us.

The psychological effects of this whole system were not salubrious, -- not for the likes of me. Anybody knows a B is not as good as an A, and as a B-starter I always felt the odium of that status. By the same token, any sub-level on the scale of human rankings leaves the incumbent thereof feeling sub-ordinate if not sub-normal. I keenly sensed, before I wound up the sub-freshman year, that I was neither fish nor fowl nor even good red herring.

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<sup>a</sup>Many readers of my generation no doubt will recall Sinclair's book, The Goose-step, which excoriated the American educational system for its regimentation, indoctrination, and pandering to the lords of capitalism.

There was some regimentation in the grades which quite probably would annoy the pupils of the current generation. On the school grounds segregation of the sexes was about as complete as the "ordering and forbidding" techniques of social control could make it.<sup>b</sup> The school authorities laid down a sharp line of demarcation and decreed that, during such time as pupils were allowed on the grounds, all males must keep on the east side and all females on the west of the line. Two outdoor privies of the standard frame type recommended by the once well-known specialist, Chic Sales, were appropriately placed, one on the east side of the line, the other on the west. Particularly stringent regulations enforced by alert supervision and severe penalties were designed to keep at a minimum all communication between boys and girls who might linger in the vicinity of these toilet facilities. Yet notes tied around large pebbles by kite string would from time to time be flung by the boys, so aimed as to bounce off the girl's privy where they might covertly be retrieved. While I could not prove it, the word whispered around was that replies occasionally were tossed back.

Ten minutes before school took up, the bell in the big belfry atop the building would toll. The principal appointed a bell monitor, who under the janitor's direction, was permitted to tug the rope that set the bell to clanging. Naturally, this was a position of marked distinction. For several years a pupil in the class a semester ahead of me held this honor. His grandfather had come to Kansas in 1866, seven years before mine arrived, built a grist mill on the Solomon River, and helped lay out the townsite. With all that working for this grandson, small wonder he was tapped for bell monitor.

Almost as prestigious was the drummer boy. After the bell ding-donged briefly to bring our play to a dead halt, the snare drum would roll briskly. Then all pupils lined up four abreast on the walks to the entrances at stations assigned their respective grades. Of course, the boys' formation faced the east entrance, the girls' the west. Each teacher was on hand to inspect her grade to see that the line was straight, and proper order maintained. When the lines were dressed and noise subsided, the principal surveyed the formation from the upper step leading to the eastern doorway, and dramatically "histed" his arm in a gesture not unlike a Brown-shirt salute. Then after a short tattoo, the drum beat out a smart marching rhythm, and the front ranks strode forward, mounting the steps where they entered the big central hallway. There the marching lines peeled off, the two on the right turning into the closest room on the north, the left-hand pair wheeling two-by-two into the near room on the south. In turn, the rear ranks followed.

Altogether it made a vivacious ceremony which could speed up your pulse if you loved a parade and enjoyed marching in it, or could have found a perch from which to view it all. Of course, repeating the same maneuver four times a day took off some of the glamor. I liked the drum-beat, especially when the colored boy,<sup>c</sup> the only one of his race then in school, was the drum monitor; in truth,

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<sup>b</sup>This technique of social control is treated in W.I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki, The Polish Peasant in Europe and America (1918). See "Methodological Note," Vol. I, and passim. It is still a popular means of keeping people from getting out of line in America. I am not abreast of the current Polish situation.

<sup>c</sup>Colored was the term applied to the few members of the Negro race in our community, and to the best of my knowledge carried no odium.

I think at the time I envied him, being as yet largely unaware of the wrongs done his race, and unaware of the discriminatory burdens that he inevitably would have to bear. But I was then thoughtless and at times preoccupied with troubles of my own, as we shall see. With regard to the attainment of monitor, it was out of the question for me, anyhow. Both the drummer and bell-ringer had to be at school early. By the time I was of an age to qualify, there was that long ride to and from the farm and all those cows.

## IV

One of the happiest features connected with school in town was the privilege of having a second home with my grandparents. Of course I didn't think of it as a privilege until I was much older, for as a thoughtless school boy, it seemed the most natural thing in the world that they should want me, and also my brothers and sister. All of us, except my youngest brother, who was not born until I was seventeen, lived with Dad's parents for long stretches, although never all at the same time. Unless the roads and weather were extremely bad, or we were taking part in special school programs, or ill, not more than one of us would "stay in town" over night. Chores "out at the farm," as much as consideration for the grandparents, probably led to this restraint. We always thought it more fun to "stay in" than to "go out," and the former sometimes was made a reward, but as I say, we didn't regard it a privilege.

Just being with the grandparents was fun, for without seeming to work at it, they made being with them a pleasure. As mentioned previously, Grandpa Clark's place was our "in town" headquarters, his barn providing livery for our horse, and his house becoming our second home. Always he would be at the end of his driveway to greet us boys as we drove from the street up the short incline to the barn. I can see him now, waving us on up the drive with a cavalryman's signal, and dancing a merry little jig accompanied by a gay, tuneless ditty usually hummed with his mouth nearly shut because he chewed tobacco and needed to keep the wad snugly tucked back under his cheek.

Seizing a bridle rein as we pulled up, he would pat the horse's head and stroke its muzzle, maybe slipping it a loaf of sugar, while we hopped out of the buggy. We lent him a hand in unhitching unless the weather was severely cold, in which case he would insist we go inside and visit with Grandma while we warmed up. It was a joy to enter the warm house in midwinter as Grandma clucked at us about cleaning our overshoes, or helped us remove our felt boots, which we wore in near zero weather to work or to ride in, but never wore to school. Grandpa could not be satisfied until our horse was comfortably stabled, fed, curried, and otherwise pampered, for he was an inveterate lover of horses, knew good horse-flesh, and in the Nineties had kept a small racing stable headed by "General Buford," a trotting steed said to have returned him a profit on the county fair circuits. Even after he closed out his medical practice, the "Old Doc" persisted in keeping his own horse, and except in bad weather made a weekly tour of the farm in his dogcart.

When brother and I had warmed up, and Grandpa had completed his self-appointed duties as hostler, he would join us inside after removing his heavy barn-coat, dusting off his suit, and brushing his shoes, a ritual always performed in the woodshed. This was a large unheated utility room built onto the back of the house adjoining the kitchen. I have seen its like in old New England houses; indeed, quite a few such annexes were to be found in Eastern Kansas as late as the

## Vignettes from a Rural Life History

Twenties and Thirties. Cooking of course was done on kitchen ranges, with wood as the principal fuel, hence the woodshed. But my grandparents used theirs for a wide variety of purposes. It housed tubs for laundry, carpenter tools, coffee grinder, water barrel kept filled for use as a fire extinguisher, a complete shoe repair and shining outfit, hooks for work clothes and rain slickers, and shelves for empty medicine bottles (though the mixing of medicines and boiling of bottles was done in the kitchen to insure aseptic conditions). This inventory is by no means complete, but I shall cut it short lest I get unduly carried away and attempt to describe all the rooms, including basements and attics, in the homes of both grandparents. Every one of these rooms had its own special fascination, and the same holds true of the barns and other outbuildings on their premises. I came to know them all to the last intriguing detail.

The time referred to in the mind picture of the mid-winter reception at Grandpa's after the ride to school, would have to be between 1906 and 1909. As mentioned earlier, I spent the first two winters I was in school living with my grandparents. Eventually other purposes were added to our daily town trips. I have already expatiated on our Sundays, ear-marked for Church services. As for Saturdays, they were a special market day and social get-together which most farm families for miles around seldom missed, including ours. A major new function which we took on, not all at once but at an accelerating rate after I was nine, was a delivery service for customers of our farm produce, especially milk, cream, cottage cheese, butter, eggs, dressed poultry, and after butchering time in the late fall, lard, sausage and other meat products. My dad had finally gotten hold of himself on the farm, enjoyed gradually improving health, and became more active in affairs. He found that he had a good thing going in that proliferating herd of cows, with three growing boys to help milk them, an indefatigable help-mate especially handy with chickens and dairy work, and a rising market in town.

The upshot of all this was that we needed better transportation and communication for market purposes as well as for school and church. One single rig, even the fairly commodious box buggy, left us cramped for space. The answer was supplied by allowing us boys to drive a team and the surrey. Dad had bought this rig (not only with "fringe on top," but ornamental dash, and other fancy trimmings) a year or so before. However, it had been reserved for family use, mainly church and state occasions such as Memorial Day, parades or funeral processions.

What a proud day it was when we boys could dash smartly to town behind a team of good horses! We seemed almost to fly over the three miles of dirt roads, which through pressure put on the township overseers by the Farmer's Union and other rural folk in the Pawnee Gap, Ohio Grove, and Salt Creek neighborhoods, were now graded and considerably improved. We left behind in the dust or mud everything, -- except automobiles. And when the mud was bad or autos stalled with flat tires or engine trouble, we passed them too. Of course, before 1910 motor cars were still few and far between.

Once in town, however, some of our glitter was soon tarnished. Making the rounds of the customers to deliver cream, buttermilk, eggs and all the rest exposed us to the condescending gaze of all our schoolmates. To be a "county-jake" from out yonder on a farm was bad enough, but to peddle from house to house such prosaic commodities as we now delivered in milk cans and egg baskets, sometimes on the very streets that passed by the school, was embarrassing if not downright

humiliating. Should we be a bit late, the school grounds, were well populated and some wiseacre was sure to bellow out, "Hi, hayseed! What's the price of milk and eggs today?" This sort of low gaucherie could be counted on to draw a horse-laugh from the claque. If we could possibly spare the time, we carefully avoided the area surrounding the school premises as a face-saving measure; indeed, if wet snow was on the ground the detours became a safety measure, for we were likely to draw a heavy barrage of snowballs that could stampede our team and cause a runaway.

Other factors than delivery of farm products, however, were more conducive to the growing estrangement from town youth of which I was painfully conscious. After living on the farm a few years, it was inevitable that we should assimilate some of the rural interests, activities, and sub-culture. My mother dropped her membership in several women's organizations in town and gradually did less visiting with girlhood friends; Dad kept up his Masonic membership but attended meetings with declining frequency; the family was no longer active in town doings except those connected with school and church. We boys were not in the "popular bunch" in grade school and were not invited to their parties. When a Boy Scout troop was formed of boys in the upper grades, I was never invited to join. As for school athletic programs and sports, they involved staying after school hours, a time pre-empted by the ride to the farm and chores. There were, of course, exceptions to the exclusion from participation and involvement with town life especially while I was in high school. But I was always made to feel I didn't fully belong.

If town barriers were thrown up against me, it by no means followed that I found a warm welcome from country neighbors or a ready access into rural social affairs. When we moved to the country (1903) some thirty farm families lived within a radius of three miles of our place<sup>d</sup> - approximately the distance we traversed in going to town. Yet while our family knew almost everybody in town (many intimately up to the time we moved), we never had more than a casual acquaintance with most of our nearby rural neighbors. Except for Aunt Bertha (my mother's sister) and Uncle Fred, whose farm home was on Salt Creek only a half mile from ours, we had no farm relatives to visit with nearer than Delphos. And despite honest, but perhaps inept, efforts on the part of our family to "neighbor" with farm acquaintances, a rift always seemed to prevent primary-group acceptance.

My dad, of course, knew all these farm families except one or two recent arrivals. But to most of them he was still the "young Doc Clark" and it was not easy for them to be socially at ease, or to fraternize rustic style with him. Several years passed before neighbors used his first name. (When eventually they did, Rolla became "Rawley." In the country it was taken as a matter of course that you called folks by their "Christian" names.) My ma made numerous friendly overtures, calling on acquaintances to take a piece of needlework to the mother of a new baby, a cake or pie for special occasions among neighbors, or custards and jellies for the sick. Sometimes the favor was reciprocated, but by and large the gap remained.

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<sup>d</sup>Only half a dozen farms in this area are occupied in similar fashion only.

I have racked my brains trying to recall a concrete incident that will best illustrate and epitomize some of the infelicitous contacts we made with the farm folk. Most occasions when we didn't quite hit it off with them seem too trivial to be recounted here, but perhaps I can offer one appropriate example, - our reception at the Pawnee Gap lyceum. Back in those days lyceum, as it was called, was popular as a form of public entertainment. The meetings, usually held at the school house or some community center, might include a wide diversity of features such as forums, exhibits of copies of famous paintings, forensics, debates, concerts, and lectures, all aimed at bringing inspirational and hopefully, educational benefits to the participants. Its origins are said to go back to the shady grove in Athens where Aristotle founded his Peripetetic School. Its rise in America, however, was associated with the Nineteenth Century movements to broadened education by attracting workers, farmers, and disadvantaged groups, and to extend learning beyond the school period. Thousands of lyceum centers existed prior to the Civil War; later Red Path and others further developed them as commercial enterprise. They were incipient forms of adult education.

Needless to say, the lyceum had undergone a sweeping transmogrification by the time it moved from the Athens of Aristotle to the Kansas milieu and found its way to our Pawnee Gap social center, the one-room school house. Being taxpayers in the district and gregariously motivated, my family joined with our neighbors in support of this lyceum. Funds were not available to provide entertainers from a commercial circuit, so home talent provided most of the programs. The first time I can recall attending, Dad and Mother took me along, leaving the younger brothers with Aunt Bertha, or possibly with the hired girl if Ma happened to have one at the time. I must have been eight or nine years old then.

The program arranged for this particular night consisted of stories of early days and pioneer life, told by a panel of half a dozen men among whom was my dad. The panel and a school board member, serving as moderator, sat on a small platform up front. Mother and I occupied one of the long benches near several neighbors. After the moderator called on a lay preacher to offer an opening prayer that I thought lasted longer than the occasion warranted, the school teacher led the group in singing "America" and "The Old Oaken Bucket." Considering lack of instrumental accompaniment, the songs went fairly well, though the leader pitched "Oaken Bucket" much too high, then tried to recoup by doing a second stanza in a lower key, which fizzled because nobody knew the words.

Preliminaries disposed of, the main program began. The moderator introduced, rather apologetically I thought, a grizzled old fellow, no doubt given first place by virtue of seniority. He launched off in a long, rambling yarn that covered coon-hunting in the Ozarks, a flood that swept down the Saline River washing away a house and several barns, and how they used to mill wheat by spreading it on the barn floor and leading horses around to tromp all over it. Like the prayer, this stretched out unduly and people got restless, many probably having heard the tale before. Eventually the old chap fell to coughing, giving the moderator a chance to give him a glass of water and some whispered advice, whereupon he abruptly quit in the middle of an exciting episode about a balloon ascension at a county fair that got fouled up on the take-off. I still don't know if the balloonist got down alive. The other narrators, possibly admonished by the moderator, kept within reasonable time limits. The younger ones told stories about Indians, buffalo, and travel in covered wagons, probably as they had heard them told by their parents.

Then it was Dad's turn. The moderator said the "Young Doc," being known to everybody, needed no introduction; nevertheless he proceeded to introduce

him with a flourish. It looked like they had saved him for the last as a sort of climax. Dad had some skill as a raconteur; also when he got wound up with a good story, he would gesticulate a lot and even act out the roles. He chose a good story I had heard him tell about two robbers who broke out of the jail in the basement of the Ottawa County courthouse. Grandpa Clark lived just across the street from the courthouse; the screams of the sheriff's wife awakened him, and he pursued the robbers in his nightshirt. One was a big heavy fellow and slow, enabling Grandpa soon to catch up with him, leap on his back, and put a choke on his throat.

At this point Dad's histrionic bent caused him to illustrate the choke hold by lunging at the old chap seated next to him and throttling him dramatically and somewhat roughly. Taken aback and visibly startled, the old fellow lurched away, almost falling off his chair. In so doing he jostled a portable blackboard left close beside him on the crowded platform. The whole assemblage audibly gasped - I was holding my breath and could hear them. Then everybody began to snicker; Ma and I excepted. I had never before in my life felt so mortified. To have Dad publicly disgrace our family with his lugubrious assault on an unsuspecting co-narrator left me limp and shrivelled.

In retrospect, I realize it could have been worse. The blackboard, tottering precariously, might have toppled completely over and crashed down on the head of the lay preacher who was seated alongside it. That would have brought forth belly-laugh instead of snickers. Or Dad might have folded up in confusion and sat down without finishing his story, as had the long-winded but harmless victim of his misguided role-playing.

Actually, the "Young Doc" kept his composure reasonably well, all things considered. He scarcely paused at the commotion or titters, went on with his tale to the end, and drew a bigger hand than any of his predecessors. However, I could feel him tighten up. He began to use bigger words and spoke stiffly, more like the town-bred doctor. That was part of the trouble with all of us, or at least with my parents and me, who were town-born and urban oriented. It was not natural for us to talk the same, to think the same, or to act the same as the farm-bred country folk comprising our community.

In terms of a sociological frame of reference, we were a marginal family. With one foot in town sub-culture and the other in country sub-culture, we could never be comfortably at home in, nor completely accommodated to either. I did not fully understand this as applying to me or my family until many years after I became familiar with the concept. I thought of marginality mainly in terms of foreign immigrants, or rural Negro migrants to Northern cities, or others torn from their native culture and thrown into another, utterly strange.

It should be noted that there is a constructive side of marginality - the marginal man may gain a more versatile orientation to different cultures. Maybe it was a condition I should have accepted with more equanimity, allowing that it is an ill wind that blows nobody good, and that the occasional discomfiture I experienced as a marginal was the source of pleasure to my companions both in the town and in the country. Somehow it is a lot easier to take such a broad, detached sociological view when lecturing to a class of sophomores, marginal or otherwise, than when caught in the crack between the cultures. Incidentally, the concept of marginality seems always to stir the interest of those students experiencing the culture stress that goes with it. As in my case, they are glad to discover there is a name for it.

Shortly after I entered the fourth grade, I became acquainted with the grim phenomenon of unseasonable death. From time to time deaths had of course occurred in our community - even the "Old Doc" occasionally lost patients, but mostly they were full of years and ripe for pulmonary pneumonia, the lethal friend of the aged. But nobody had died who was so close to me that their death hit me hard. Then late that winter, many classmates suddenly were absent from school, red quarantine signs were tacked near the front doors of numerous houses, and "Old Doc," who had tried to retire, was over-run with patients. The deadly "croup," as diphtheria was called, had struck our town, stupefying with dread those families with small children, for it preyed mercilessly on the young. School, church and all public meetings, save funerals, were shut down. At some doorways black crepe soon added a dismal contrast to the garish red quarantine signs.

Coming to town to make deliveries, I was warned not to enter the houses beyond the back porch. Even funerals were strange affairs, unwontedly short and sparsely attended but following closely one upon another. Some classmates who were stricken survived; others died in spasms of the "choking death."

Before the shock of this epidemic had fully worn off, we boys were rudely jolted again. Our faithful dog, old Tobe, who had been with us at the farm ever since we moved there, disappeared. We looked all over the places he was known to go, and asked neighbors, but found no trace of him. After more than two weeks passed, our suspense was brought to a sad conclusion. Mother came running out from the south porch of the farmhouse as we arrived home from school one afternoon. She wanted to be the first to break the news to us, and to do it as gently as she could. Tobe had been found that afternoon alive, but starved, crippled and half dead. A neighbor had picked him up in his spring wagon over by Rock City,<sup>e</sup> and had just brought him to our place; his team and wagon were hitched at the tool shed. Mat said the farmer was helping Dad treat our pet in the shed where we kept his kennel. We rushed down there, leaving Ma to unload our buggy and unharness the horse. Stretched out between Dad and the farmer, both kneeling, was old Tobe.

As we crowded near, Tobe recognized us and feebly tried to wag his tail. He was bedraggled and his usually glossy black coat was full of cockleburs. Some of the hurt and sadness seemed to pass from his eyes as we knelt close to his head, his gaze meeting ours. Then we saw that his right front leg was gone, severed at the knee.

While Dad proceeded with cleansing the wound and applying ointments and bandages from his medicine kit, the neighbor told us what had happened - as much, anyway as he knew, or could deduce concerning Tobe's ordeal. The dog apparently had stepped into a steel trap, probably a large one with powerful springs and serrate jaws, of a kind used to catch coyotes, or sometimes bob-cats and other predators. A bachelor farm hand living two miles west of our place had heard, when the wind was right, what sounded like the distant howls of a dog in distress.

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<sup>e</sup>Rock City is not a town, but the name given to a remarkable group of large sandstone concretions lying in a field three miles southwest of Minneapolis. They are only about a hundred yards or so from the northwest corner of the former Clark farm, but a half mile from our house. Rock City was a favorite play spot for us boys and our pals. Attempts to make it into a State Park in recent years have been stymied by litigation over land rights, but at present headway is being made in development of Rock City as a tourist attraction.

When the sounds kept recurring, this man told our neighbor for whom he then worked, and they joined in searching the hilly pasture land east of Spring Creek, whence had come those faint ululations. They rode over hills and ravines, covering at least a section (one square mile) before a gathering thunderstorm ended what had been a futile search.

So, hopelessly caught out there in the lonely hills, likely in the mouth of a coyote's den, Tobe had struggled against the unyielding steel through the long hours, gnashing his teeth upon the trap's jaws, biting away at its chain, pawing and scratching the trap and the rocks around it, and raising his cries for help. The days and nights passed and his hunger and thirst grew. All his tugging and pulling to free himself from that pitiless thing that bit deep into his flesh and bone brought him only worse pain. Finally, he began to gnaw at his own ensnared leg, with teeth now worn dull or chipped off from grinding and gnashing at the metal. How many days elapsed before he freed himself we never knew, but at last he gnawed his way through the bone, tore away the last shreds of flesh that fettered him, and limped toward home. When our neighbor first saw him, he was puzzled as to the identity of the black object grovelling in the sandy Rock City road, that caused his team to shy and rear in alarm. He had to tie the horses up at the roadside fence while he carried the stricken dog to his wagon.

Ma had never allowed dogs in the house, but it was her suggestion that we bring Tobe in while we nursed him back to health. However, the dog vetoed the plan, crawling to the door and whining until we returned him to his kennel in the shed. Only a day or so later, I remember how, after chores were done, I sat down by the kennel and tried to persuade him to lap up some of the warm milk I had brought him. Nothing would stay on his stomach; it was plain he was failing rapidly. As he watched me, I fathomed a death message, cryptic but unmistakable, coming from those familiar eyes. When we found him gone the next morning, I was scarcely surprised. We traced him by tatters of the bandage from the stump of his foreleg to his self-chosen burial place. His body lay near the bottom of a draw some twenty rods beyond the Big Barn - a spot where we used to romp with him on our way to the Big Pasture after the cows.

Tobe was just a dog, not even a full-blooded dog of a good breed, but he had made himself so useful and had so endeared himself to our family that his death was mourned. My father cursed bitterly any trapper who would leave traps unattended for weeks; Ma said the neighbor should have let people know sooner that a dog had been heard howling for days, so we could have helped search. We boys were heavy-hearted for a long time. Though we spoke of him as "Old" Tobe, he was only seven or eight years old when he met what to us seemed a cruel and untimely end.

I have told this story pretty straight, much as I have told it to my children and grandchildren. In so doing I realize I have violated Lloyd Morgan's Law of Parsimony as applied to animal behavior, and laid myself open to charges of rank caninitarianism, an appropriate though barbaric term Mark Sullivan applied to the widespread tendency of giving moral qualities to dogs and getting excessively sentimental about them. Nevertheless, I offer no apology because I think the episode thus narrated with its "pathetic fallacies" reveals something of the closeness, warmth, and affection with which dogs and other domestic animals were regarded in our rural culture. Town life in a mechanized society offers nothing like it. There a dog can be a pet, a plaything, a highly bred prize contender at the shows, or an artificially groomed ornament that flatters vanity by lending its owner status. But on the frontier and the early-day farm, a good dog though a mongrel like Tobe, was truly a friend and valued as a useful partner in farm economy. I mean no disrespect when I say the death of this dog saddened me more than the deaths of two kinsfolk occurring in our family about that time.

I refer to the passing of my two great grandmothers, Great Grandma Hart, my Grandma Clark's mother, who had lived in their house since I started school, and Great Grandma Chapin, who took turns living with her sons. She was often at Grandpa's after he brought his family from Delphos back to Minneapolis. To me it seemed altogether natural and normal not only that all four grandparents should live conveniently close at hand, but that both of their homes should be graced with the presence of a great grandmother. Since I spent much time at Grandma Clark's I came to know her aged mother very well. She would work piecing quilts or knitting, while I read to her from my school reader, or recited poetry I was trying to memorize.

Born Lucy Steward in 1825 in Antrim County, Ireland, of Scottish parents, she had migrated with her family to Canada when she was nine years old. Some ten years later they moved to Kishwaukee, Ogle County, Illinois. There she married her first husband, John Merryfield, by whom she had twelve children. She told me how he had stepped on a hedge thorn and died of lockjaw when he was only 47 years old. She could recall her childhood in Ireland, and the beginning of the potato blight that brought on the terrible famine. Now, though her teeth were all gone, she still enjoyed her meals. Grandpa would always give her the bone marrow from the roast of round steak, and Grandma would cook her special patties of ground meat and vegetables.

The other great grandma was born Anna Husen in Erie County, New York in 1826. She was plump, jolly, and had a lovely head of curly gray hair. Like Great Grandma Hart, she also enjoyed her meals. Moreover, she held to a conviction that any one inclined to be thin, or who might be losing weight, was in a poor state of health. She would cite my dad as a case in point, and when she first felt me over thoroughly -- this was on a visit by my folks to the Chapin family in Delphos, she shook her head worriedly and remarked that she feared I was going to take after my frail father. Only a year or so later, however, I eased her mind on this score by beginning to fatten up. At the big family dinners of the Chapin clan on Sundays, holidays and other special occasions, she would often hop up from the big table in the dining room where the grown folk ate, and come around peering through her spectacles to examine the plates on the small tables in the sitting room or kitchen, assigned to us small fry. If we were short of any of the viands being served the adults (except coffee) she would exclaim, "Land o' Goshen, can't you girls (meaning my aunts) look after these young 'un?"

The two old ladies both lived to be eight-three. Great Grandma Hart was the first to go. She had been ailing that spring, and spent more time alone in her room, but always seemed glad to have us boys visit at her bedside when we carried her lunch tray at noon. One bright, sunny afternoon in early May, Grandpa Clark met brother and me as we returned from school. Taking each of us by the hand, he said, "It is time now that you boys said goodbye to your great grandma, for she is about to leave us." When we entered her bedroom, we saw her lying on her back, her face nearly as colorless as the white pillow slip. Her eyes were wide open but vacant, and she was breathing in rapid, hoarse gasps. Going out in the backyard to hitch up for the ride to the farm, the air seemed so fragrant with the scent of growing things, and so alive with the songs of birds, the hum of bees in the white-clover lawn, and other glad sounds of spring, that death seemed unreal. We were more solemn than usual as we drove over the Solomon River bridge, past Markley's Grove, and along the green wheat fields that bordered the road to the farm. Yet I did not shed a tear until we put up the horse and entered the house. Dad was playing a doleful hymn on the Edison phonograph, "Rescue the Perishing."

I have never since been able to endure that hymn, it seemed like a false note. Great Grandma Hart was not perishing, but leaving us naturally at the end of her time, as was nature's way. Before midnight the "Old Doc" phoned that she had died in her sleep.

Just seven months later the other great grandma died at Delphos. It was on Mother's birthday, and one day before mine. Instead of the double birthday celebration planned, we attended the burial service in the Minneapolis Highland Cemetery. Dad asked me to stay in the surrey and mind the horses while he went with Ma to join the other relatives gathered around the grave for the final service. I was more than content to do so. No emotional evangelism was injected into the funerary rites of either of these well-loved ancestors. For that I was then, and still am, thankful. The practices associated with death and bereavement in our culture do not always make an agreeable picture. But in the passing of my two great grandmothers I felt no rude shock nor heard lamentations of the life conditions set for man by a demi-urge heedless of his will. They lived and they died in the bosom of their families; never, if I rightly interpret what I heard and saw of their roles in those crepusculine years of their lives, were they made to feel useless, burdensome, unwanted. Neither were they kept hopelessly lingering by medical technologies devised to preserve the vegetative systems of the human organism long after loss of the higher faculties that invest with meaning the existence of our kind.

## VI

For the most part my role as a grade school pupil was pleasantly suited to my disposition, and as mentioned previously, I almost never was bored. However, sometime after the events just narrated, I came under a teacher who somehow began to irritate me. The aggravation began slowly and increased in a steady and insidious fashion without my being fully able to understand the cause of it. This teacher--I will call her Miss Moder--was about forty, and had long and successful experience in rural and town schools. After the good-looking blonde in the preceding grade, I could not call her physically attractive, but it was not her looks but certain mannerism and ways of speaking about things and people that soon began to gall me.

Of course, this was an era when moralizing was ubiquitous. Our copybooks were full of worthy precepts and wise sayings, most of them reflecting Calvinistic ideals with pragmatic modifications as introduced, for example, in Poor Richard's Almanack. A similar ethic was glorified in our spellers, which derived from Noah Webster but had been edited, if I recall correctly, by an orthographer named Rathbun. As for our readers, based on the classic McGuffey model but edited by someone who undertook to outdo the master,--they fairly oozed pietistic sentiment in story, fable, verse, proverb and parable. Reared as I had been, I could take without flinching a considerable dose of moralizing on week days as well as the inevitable glut dished out on Sundays and holidays. But when the dolorous platitudes, unctuous precepts, and solemn admonitions of the good Miss Moder were piled on the moralistic pabulum of the texts, the whole business became fulsome to say the least. Almost unwittingly I began to chafe under it and to react adversely.

The specific thing of Miss Moder's that triggered me off was an irritating verbal habit she employed in her didactic preachments. She would begin: "Now class, it behooves you to listen to this and listen well." Upon finishing the

oleaginous platitude she would add, "It behooves all to heed what I have said, and to act accordingly." The first few times you heard her "behoove," it didn't seem to amount to so much. But you had to sit there and hear it over and again, as she got up steam and went to work on the morals of the class as a whole (and you heard it both for the "A"s and the "B"s). Then at other times she "behooved" at a single helpless pupil taking him to task for some shortcoming. The effect steadily mounted until it got under your skin. For a time I shrugged off her "behooving," a word not in my vocabulary then (and one I've never made use of since, for reasons that will soon become sufficiently apparent). As she proceeded to inflict her promiscuous moralizing on us I began to feel myself tighten up. I waited resentfully to catch the telltale prelude to her next saw or maxim. There were others in the class similarly affected, for paper wads and missiles from beanshooters began to fly whenever her back was turned. Miss Moder's discipline, never her strongest point, was sadly deteriorating.

It was unlike me to "cut up" in school. Never had I thrown a paper wad. Some of the more "ornery" town kids had cast jibes at me as a teacher's pet on the grounds that I never joined in their deviltry. But one day a large, slobbery paper wad smaked my neck below my right ear while Miss Moder was engaged in "behooving" a boy seated off to the left to "Go to the ant, thou sluggard." Without thinking, I seized and flung that wad of chewed linen<sup>f</sup> with all my might but with no regard to direction. The missile glanced off the shoulder of a girl several desks up front and leftward. She let out a screech that was far more piercing than was justified, and Miss Moder wheeled around just in time to see that wad deflected in her direction, while my arm was still upraised. She could scarcely have displayed more rancor if it had struck her. "You, Carroll Clark, you! To think you would stoop to anything so lowdown! I shall report you to Professor Smith this day." D.O. Smith was the Principal.

The ensuing events unfolded like a Greek tragedy. It was well known that Principal D.O. Smith was a severe disciplinarian, making free use of corporal punishment. Minor offenders received several strokes from a heavy ruler across the open palms of their hands, the number of strokes meted out depending on the seriousness of their misdemeanor. If reported for a second offense, a miscreant was given a severe caning. For the worst malefactors, the principal kept a rubber hose which he was reputed to lay on with a heavy and tireless hand. While I waited in the classroom for Miss Moder to return after reporting me, my mind sorted over the gruesome details I had picked up from playground gossip concerning Professor Smith's treatment of various offenders.

The first act of the drama of my punishment, however, did not bring a confrontation with the principal. Miss Moder came back still in a high dudgeon saying that Professor Smith could not deal with me till the morrow, but she had some things to say to me and that it would behoove me to mark her every word. I shall pass over most of the long homily that followed. She would have me know how it shocked her to discover I was a ne'er-do-well and capable of such meanness as she had caught me in. Grabbing each lapel of my double-breasted coat and giving them some hard yanks for emphasis, she reminded me that an empty sack never stands up, that a dead fish cannot swim upstream, that hellborn vices start their ugly growth from such transgressions as mine, and several other Great Truths it be-

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<sup>f</sup>The best paper wads were made by masticating linen paper. At that time linen was widely used in paper manufacture.

hooved me to ponder well. All the while she fastened on me her beady black eyes and tugged at my coat. I noticed that her eyes were slightly bloodshot and her breath was bad. I felt very uncomfortable but only slightly repentant.

However, when she released me with a final execration and the injunction that I must report to Professor Smith's office after school dismissed next day, I suddenly realized I had a more exigent matter to ponder. It was by then after five o'clock; I knew the team and surrey had been hitched and the brothers waiting for an hour. Chores would be delayed, supper late, everyone in the family would be upset by the break in routine, and demanding to know what kept me so long. I had to think of an excuse that would cover my being late and also next day, and come up with it fast. Prevarication was an art I shrunk from and rarely practiced, but to disclose to grandparents and parents that I was in bad trouble at school was to invite ruin. The gravity of my plight stirred my mind to invention with all scruples tossed aside. In a flash, a plausible explanation hit me. Easter holiday was approaching, and Mr. Kinneer, the music teacher, had been put in charge of special exercises which the four upper grades would present to the public on Good Friday. Only a day or two previously he had spoken to me about singing in a mixed double quartet for the occasion. It might require a rehearsal one evening after school--only a half hour or so, he had said. Instantly I was inspired to expand the rehearsals to cover my need for an excuse. The strategem worked; my excuse was accepted, though I was reproved for not sending word by the other boys that I would be late.

Next day I fidgeted through classes in apprehension of what was coming. Would the hard whacks of the ruler across my open palms--that was the chastisement I figured my misdeed would cost me--be likely to raise welts so I couldn't milk? How could I talk my way out of that awkward eventuality? Miss Moder seemed to keep eyeing me smugly as if sensing and enjoying the strain I was undergoing. The gong sounded, pupils cleared their desks, the drum struck up the beat and they marched away, leaving me to repair to Smith's office. Outside his door I found two other culprits waiting and presently two more joined us. One after the other at intervals of about fifteen minutes, the four were called in and disposed of before my turn came. The second boy was a notorious rowdy in the seventh grade. He was soundly caned and yelped as if in anguish as the blows fell. When he made his exit, he slammed the door open and banged it shut defiantly, causing Professor Smith to rush out and pursue him down the stairs. The number three boy was not kept as long, and judging from the sounds, must have received six or seven ruler strokes on each hand. The fourth fellow was held over a quarter hour, but no noise from within disclosed how he expiated his offense. Then it was my turn.

My confrontation with the principal went badly from the start. He was a stocky man with a ruddy but to me a forebidding countenance. He started in by roughly demanding to know why I would deliberately and maliciously sling or shoot paper wads at Miss Moder. I expostulated that I had not done so deliberately, that I hadn't aimed at the teacher, that it was the first time ever, and I could offer no explanation why I did such a thing. Expotulating with Professor Smith was the wrong thing to do, for he rejected every defense I made, and sneered at my disclaimers. It would have been wiser to have shut my mouth, but he was making me out a liar which got my dander up. While he harangued me, of course I had to stand silent and take it, but the minute he paused or gave me an opening--(as for instance when he queried, "You think you are mighty smart, don't you?")--I could not resist coming back at him, though I spoke politely and remembered always to say "sir" as I had been taught at home. He claimed he had been keeping an eye on me as a trouble-making scamp for a long time. I doubted if this was

true, the man had never spoken to me and seldom had so much as glanced in my direction when he supervised the school grounds. So I asked him who had reported me previously, and when, and for what? This really set him off. He rose up from his swivel chair to stride angrily back and forth across the room, gripping his hands together and cracking his knuckles.

By then I was too desperate to care what Professor Smith said or did to me. It clearly was no use trying to tell the man the facts of the situation, for he only taunted me sarcastically when I tried to explain, or expressed regret, or promised to do better. So I resigned myself and subsided, hoping he would soon take his ruler, (or it might be the cane in view of the bad turn the interview had taken) and get the business over with. Instead, he settled in his chair again and launched off on a long tirade against the riffraff, especially the young smart alecks, toughs and mischief-makers I was presumed to represent, who were infesting the public schools. Finally much to my surprise, he rose again and peremptorily dismissed me without applying ruler or cane. But he told me to report again the following Monday.

Anticipation of doom can be worse than the reality. Over that long weekend my imagination ran riot depicting what the next session with the principal would bring. The word had spread among schoolmates that I was in bad trouble with teacher and principal, so my brothers had heard about it. Of course I swore them to secrecy, and they generously agreed to do my chores Monday so I could stay at Grandpa's after "rehearsing the Easter music." My greatest worry was that my folks would hear about the affair, and I would bring disgrace on the family.

Monday morning I got a break. Mr. Kinnear told me at music class that his plans for the double quartet had failed (only one other boy had consented to sing), but he wanted me to take the alto part in a duet, a role of more consequence. Could I practice that evening? Indeed I could, but not till after supper. So it was arranged, and it was a relief to know my deception had assumed a measure of legitimacy. At recess many of the boys hung around to question me about my session with the principal. It was rumored I had already been given one licking and was to receive another, a double jeopardy seldom inflicted on any but the most incorrigible. To be thus singled out for such special attention by my peers and treated with mingled awe and respect as a master of turpitude was a wholly new experience for me, and made up for some of the anxieties and hardships met in achieving the distinction. In class many of the girls gazed at me with unwonted interest and curiosity, as if seeing me as I really was for the first time. I thought Miss Moder appeared rather abstracted and subdued. At any rate, she did less behooving than ordinarily. Could she be concerned about having brought down on me a greater wrath than ever intended?

My hour arrived and again I marked time at Professor Smith's door. Several teachers and the janitor were given audience ahead of me, but I was the first pupil called in. He started in by asking me to name the boy whom I had claimed hit me with the paper wad before I threw it at Miss Moder. I had not seen it thrown at me, and told him so. This denial led to a long interrogation in an effort to force or trick me into informing on other "mischief-makers in this ring of bean-shooters and paper-wad throwers." Of course I knew most of the fellows who were handy with such missiles but naturally I refused to name any.

At long last Professor Smith gave up the inquisition. Yanking open a desk drawer, he hauled out not the ruler, not the cane, but the rubber hose. Certainly this was a surprise, but so relieved was I to be done with the objurgatory flailing

and verbal pestering that I was by no means flabbergasted or daunted. Indeed, my thoughts seemed to brighten and my perceptions sharpen in a wave of euphoria. The rubber hose, I noted, was about thirty inches long, over half an inch thick, and dark gray in color. I had always imagined this instrument of flagellation to be hollow, like a garden hose. Instead it was solid but extremely limber, so that when the principal tossed it on the desk, keeping one end in hand as he talked, it seemed to wriggle about like a live, gray water snake. He pulled off his coat, exposing a rather soiled shirt front. His usually ruddy complexion was heightened in color, and he still wore a bit of court plaster on one jowl where he must have nicked himself shaving.

If necessary, I think I could still repeat almost verbatim Professor Smith's peroration, as he wound up talk and sprang to robust action. He said the sneaking, underhanded deviltry my kind were carrying was a threat not only to the schools but to the persons and goods of all decent, law-abiding citizens of our great country. "We are going to put a stop to it if it takes all the constables, sheriffs, militia, the United States Army, the Navy and the Pinkerton Detective Agency!<sup>8</sup> You were caught red-handed, young fellow, and I'm going to teach you a lesson if I have to larrup the living daylight out of you." With that he grasped the back of my neck, pushed my face forward over his desk, and felt over the seat of my pants to make sure I had no protective insulation under the garment. Then he swung the hose.

The icy sting of the first lick caused me to rare up involuntarily, but I was roughly forced back down and so remained as the punishment proceeded. After maybe half a dozen licks my posterior area grew pretty numb so the pain wasn't bad. At every wallop the principal grunted with the exertion; I lost count of the number of them but there were at least two dozen. At no time did I make any outcry. Actually the main bout was an anti-climax after all those verbal preliminaries and mental forebodings. It was soon over, and I was dismissed. Three or four white-faced urchins outside the door caught a glimpse of the principal with hose in hand as I left. Their reports of the licking I had taken, based on the sounds overheard, varied somewhat, but were all sufficiently exaggerated to fascinate themorbid and enhance the unsought notoriety that for some time came my way. As the unregenerate cut-up who had opened a paper-wad barrage on the moralistic Miss Moder, and who had absorbed two or three dozen lashes from the redoubtable Smith's rubber hose, I gained a temporary following that included even some of the tougher town kids. But kids are fickle and all notoriety meets a dead end. The new image was ill-suited to my habits or temperament; I failed to play the role expected of me. Before school recessed for summer vacation, another cut-up outdid me by defying and scuffling with Professor Smith on the school grounds, and I was in eclipse.

In concluding this episode, I should remark that the Easter program came off well, including my duet with Sam Gage, the other kid with enough guts and musical passion to stand up publicly and sing. For some time I feared word of my misdoings would reach my parents, but somehow it didn't happen. Discipline in the school had been deteriorating steadily throughout that year, and Principal

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<sup>8</sup>In those days that agency was the nearest thing to our present F.B.I.

D.O. Smith's severe repressive measures, as might be expected, failed to halt the trend. Soon after, he was on the way out. A few weeks after Easter poor Miss Moder became ill and was unable to meet her classes. I was alarmed to learn that the "Old Doc" had taken her case, fearing she might tell tales and give me away. Accidentally I overheard Grandpa discussing her ailments with one of her relatives. It seems she was highly strung, overwrought, and near a nervous breakdown. Also she was bothered a lot with constipation for which the "Old Doc" was prescribing psyllium seeds.

When Miss Moder returned to school, I noted she was easing off from her incessant moralizing. I felt I owed her something for not disclosing my misdeeds to my granddad. So I edged up to her desk one day to say I was sorry she had been ill, and had missed her, and was glad she was back. You should have seen the way that woman brightened up and smiled. She replied that my grandfather was a wonderful doctor, and had along with his medicines made her realize that it behooved her to get more rest and find more relaxation. So she was planning a summer vacation with friends in Colorado. I told her I was glad. Also I noted without mentioning it that her breath didn't smell bad--no doubt owing to the psyllium seeds.