Scotch Heaven

Prophetic indeed was the man who uttered, "You can fight armies or disease or trespass, but the settler never." Word comes of yet another settlement of homesteaders in this burgeoning province of ours. Who can ever doubt, with the influx which is peopling a childless land and planting schools by the side of cattle corrals, that Teton County is destined to be the most populous in Montana? Of this latest colony, situated into the foothills a dozen or so miles west of Gros Ventre, it is said so many of the arrivees originated in the land of the kilt and the bagpipe that Gros Ventrians call the elevated new neighborhood Scotch Heaven.

--Choteau Quill, July 40, 1891

"Tenderly now, Angus. Up a bit with your end. Up up up, that's the direction. A hair more. Almost there. There. Ready to drop?"

"Let's do."

With a sound like a big box lid closing, the log fell into place, its notched ends clasping into those of the cabin's side walls.

"Well?" Rob demanded. "Does your end fit?"
"Snug enough. You could barely toss a cat through the crack."

That brought him in a rush. Rob eyed along the space between logs that you scarcely could have slid a knife blade into and that would easily be chinked, and lamented, "A tolerant tolerance, Lucas and my father would have called that in the wheelshop. These Montana trees have more knots in them than a sailor's fingers."

"As my kindly landlord, you'll of course stand in front of this crack all winter to keep the wind off me," I asserted.

"As my grateful tenant, you'll of course be thankful not to have to spend the winter out in a hollow tree with the squirrels," he imparted.

"Now that I think about it, a bit of breeze is always refreshing. Add another log to this castle of yours, had we better?"

"Let's do."

Do I laugh or cry, now, at the innocence with which we became homesteaders? Either is apt. Nobody new to it knows thing one about the homesteading life. I give Rob and myself our due credit, diligently, we at least learned our ignorance in a hurry.
"Who do you suppose invented this?" Barbed wire was the topic; neither of us liked the stuff, nor for that matter the idea of wrapping our homesteads in it. But the gospel according to Ninian Duff was persuasive: If you don't fence, you'll wake up one morning and find yourself looking into the faces of five hundred Double W cows.

"Never mind that, why didn't they invent ready-made postholes to go with it?"

"Now, you know the answer to that. No homestead has enough room to store all the postholes it needs."

"Dig, just dig."
God proctored poor dim old Job about how the measures of the earth were laid. If Job had been a homesteader, he could have readily answered that the government of the United States of America did it.

The vast public domain westward of the Mississippi River, as Crofutt put the matter for us when Rob and I were somewhere back there on his oceanic border from emigration to immigration, has been summed in an idea as simple as it is powerful: the land has been made into arithmetic. This is to say, surveyors have established governing lineations across the earth, the ones extending north and south known as principal meridians and those east-to-west as base lines. Having thus cast the main lines of the net of numeration across half a continent, so to speak, they further divided the area
into an ever smaller mesh, first of Ranges measured westward from the meridians and then of townships measured from the base lines.

Each township is six miles square, thus totaling thirty-six square miles, and—attend closely for just a few moments more—it is these townships, wherein the individual homesteader takes up his landholding, that the American penchant for systemization fully flowers. Each square mile, called a section, is numbered, in identical fashion throughout all townships, thusly:

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As can be seen, the continuousness of the numeration is reminiscent of the boustrophedonic pattern a farmer makes as he plows back and forth the furrows of his field—or, indeed, of the alternate directions in which ancient Greek is written! Thus does the originality of the American experiment, the ready granting of land to those industrious enough to seek it, emulate old efficacious patterns!

Rob's remark was that Crofutt himself verged to Greek here, but the system by which we filed our homestead claims of 160 acres apiece did amount merely to finding section markers—Ninian Duff could stride blindfolded to every one of them in the North Fork
valley—and making the journey to the land office at Fort Benton and saying to the registrar, this quarter-section is the square of earth that will be mine. And after three years of living upon it and improving it by your building and husbandry labors, yours it legally became.

Rob's choice of claim was lofty; his land lay across the middle of the south slope of Breed Butte itself, like a saddle blanket down a horse's side.

By choosing so high onto the butte he was forfeiting the meadow of wild hay that meandered beside the North Fork the full length of the valley, hay that seemed to leap from the ground and play racing games with the wind as we hammered together Rob's house. And he was

More serious, to my way of thinking, he was spurning the creek itself, source for watering livestock.

"In the eventual, a dab of hay more or less won't make the difference," he assured me in that Barclay future-owning style.

"What counts, see now, is that no one can build to the west of me here"—the timbered crest and long rocky shoulder of Breed Butte indeed making that an unlikelihood. "Angus, this butte will be the high road into all the pasture there ever was and I'll be right here on it." There he had me. The key to Scotch Heaven was not our homesteads, because 160 acres is not nearly enough to pasture a band of sheep on. It was the free range, the grass of the foothills to the west and on up into the mountains, that was going to be the
larder for our livestock. Ninian Duff had seen so, and Rob and I, not to mention our treasurer Lucas, could at least puff ourselves that we glimpsed old Ninian's vision. So I could not really naysay Rob's choice of site.

Or at least no more than he did mine. My homestead selection lay southwest of his, down into the last of the North Fork valley before the buttes and foothills took command of the geography. To me the nearness of the creek was a pleasure; as the North Fork wound down the valley it seemed as if the water and the land were working together, making a fit. Meadows of wild hay stood along both sides of the creek, and the bottomland was flat enough to build on in comfort—for all the open glory of Rob's site, you always were trudging up or down slope there. Ridges, coulees, the mountainwall of rock called Roman Reef in the notch at the west end of the valley, the upmost trees on Breed Butte all could be seen from my yard-to-be; the tops of things have always held interest for me. Rob's house was just out of view behind the shoulder of the ridge. Indeed, no other homesteads could be seen from mine, and for some reason I liked that, too.

Positioning my house was a matter Rob and I held opposite views of. He insisted a house ought to sit square with the world. His did, the length of the house straight east and west. No, I maintained, I wanted to face the creek, which cut at an angle through my acreage. Angling the house would put the front door around a corner from the wind, too, and provide a view of the nearest coulee and the long ridge up to--

Not a right policy, he told me, to build off center such a way. But it was my house and if I wanted it to sit cattywampus and skewgy and cockeyed--
"You can see into tomorrow from up here, I will say that," saying it despite my difference of opinion with Rob about to justify another of
That's right, it was nobody's but mine, I said, and it was going to be built facing the creek.

Bad policy, he repeated, but began hewing corners of my logs.

Here then is land. Just that, land, naked earthskin. Now put upon it house, outbuildings, fences, crop, livestock, haystacks, performing every bit of this at once and irrespective of weather and wallet and whether you have ever laid hand to any of these tasks before. Build before you can plan, build in your sleep and through your mealtimes, but build, pilgrim, build, claimant of the earth,
build, build, build. You are permitted to begin in the kind delusion that your utensils of homestead-making at least are the straightforward ones--axe, hammer, adze, pick, shovel, pitchfork. But your true tools are other. The nearest names that can be put to them are hope, muscle, and time.

"Hotter'n not, said the Hottentot."

"And what do you expect, man. Montana is so high, it's up close to the sun."

"From what Ninian says we'll be wanting some of this heat next year in here."

"Then we'd better put up some sunshine like blocks of ice, had we? Make ourselves the heat merchants of the Two Medicine country. Barclay and McCaskill, sunmongers."

"Sweatmongers, more like. You're dripping like a fish."

"You're liquid enough yourself. Hats, now there's what we ought to have invented. We wouldn't last an hour on this roof without these hats. Even Lucas won't step out a door without his Stetson on. And look at the situation of cowboys. Their horses wouldn't respect them if they didn't wear hats that'll hold a bushel of oats."

"Cowboy yourself, ride that rafter a bit my way. There, that's the place."
Up to that point in life Rob's materials of work had been wood and metal, mine had been words and numbers. Now we were trying to fathom the mysterious substance known as sheep.

In its way, a band of sheep is like a garden on legs. Every spring a crop of lambs, every summer a crop of wool. Feed us and clothe us too—not even potatoes yield so beneficially. But the fleecies are a garden that wanders around looking for its own extinction. In the Two Medicine country there was much that was willing to oblige their mortal urge. I can tell you to this moment the anguish when, a week after we had trailed our yearlings home to the North Fork from their former owner in the Choteau country, Rob and I found our first dead sheep. A fine fat ewe on her back, four legs in the air like hooved branches. In her clumsy cocoon of wool she had rolled helplessly onto her back when she lay down to scratch a tick itch. Rob was shocked, I admit I was a bit unsettled myself. And as any sheep owner does, we began thinking the awful arithmetic to ourself: if we lose another ewe next week...if we lose one again tomorrow...A little of that and in your mind you not only have no sheep left, you possess less than that, cavities of potential loss that will grow to the extent of however many sheep you can possibly buy in the future.

Thus you try to think instead of the benefits of sheep. Watch them thrive on grass a cow wouldn't even put its head down for. Watch the beautiful fleeces, rich and oily to the touch, come off them as they are sheared with the Duff and Erskine bands. Dream a year ahead to when you can watch your first crop of lambs enlarge themselves week by week.
"You can see into tomorrow from up here, I will say that," saying it in spite of my own creekside inclinations. All of the valley of the North Fork sat sunlit below Rob's site this day, and the mountainline crowding the entire sky to the west, and by strolling to the brow of the butte the eastward expanse of plains all the way to the far, far Sweetgrass Hills was presented.

Rob aimed his chin down at the Duff and Erskine homesteads, one-two there beside the creek at the mouth of the valley. "I didn't come all the miles from one River Street to live down there on another."

Ninian Duff brought his own decree when he rode up to examine Rob's aloof site. "You'll eat your fill of wind up here," Ninian warned.

Rob found that worth a laugh. "Is there somewhere in this country that a man wouldn't have wind in his teeth?"

Even while we three stood gazing, the tall grass of the valley bottom was being ruffled. A dance of green down there, and the might of the mountains above, and the aprons of timber and this grazing land between-- was a view to climb to, you had to give Rob that. Even Ninian looked softened by it all, his prophetic beard did some real choosing calm against his chest. I was moved enough to say: "You chose us when you came to the North Fork, Ninian."

The beard moved back and forth across the chest. "None of us has bragging rights to this country yet."
"Angus, I wish we had oakum to do the chinking with. Make nice dark seams against the logs instead of this clay."

"Toussaint told you how to darken it."

"Considering the cure, I'll accept the ill, thank you just the same." The Toussaint Rennie formula for darkening the chinking clay was to mix it generously with horse manure.
A buckboard was coming. Coming at speed along the road beside the North Fork, past Duffs' without slowing, past Erskines' just short of flying. It looked like a runaway, but at the track which led up the butte to us the light wagon turned as precisely as if running on a railroad track. Then Rob and I saw one of the two figures wave an arm. Arm only, with no hand to be seen. Lucas. And Nancy was driving.

The rig, one of Dantley's hires, clattered to a stop just short of running over us and the house. The horses were sweat-wet and looked astounded at what was happening to them. Nancy seemed as
impervious as she did in the kitchen. Lucas was jovial as thick jam on thin bread.

"By Jesus, there's nothing like a buggy ride to stir the blood," he announced as the buckboard's fume of dust caught up with the contingent. "Air into the body, Angus, lad, you're working yourself thin as a willow. Come to town for some buttermilk one of these evenings." Both arms cocked winglike for balance, bounded down from the wagon. "So this is your castle, Robbie. I've seen worse, somewhere, sometime."

"You're a fund of compliments," Rob said back, but lightly.

"Gros Ventre has news, lads," announced Lucas. His stubs were in his coat pockets now, he was wearing his proprietor-of-Montana demeanor. "Two new businesses. A hide merchant and a doctor. We're going to need to put a sign up: one way or another, this town can save your skin."

"We have news of our own," Rob reported in turn. "Three families are on their way from Fife."

(The Scotch are wonderful at living anywhere but Scotland."

"Grand, grand. I suppose they'll all be Bible-swallowers like Ninian, but nobody's perfect."

"By Jesus, this is the country." Lucas rotated himself until he stood gazing south, down the slope of Breed Butte to the North Fork and its clumps of willows. Beyond against the sky were the rimrock walls of Roman Reef and then of Grizzly Reef, and beyond Grizzly other mountains stood in rugged file into the Teton
"By Jesus, this is the country. Lads, we'll see the day when all this is farms and ranches. And Robbie, you're up in the place to watch it all." A whiff of breeze caught at Lucas's hat and he clamped an arm stub onto the crown of it. "You'll eat some wind here, though."

While we toured our visitors through the attractions of the homestead and Lucas dispensed Gros Ventre gossip--Sedge and Lila were ready to open the hotel but couldn't agree what sign to paint on it; Range had another new "niece"--I tried to watch Rob without showing that I was. And in turn Rob was trying not to look at Nancy. Meanwhile Lucas was as bold as the sun, asking questions, commenting. Evidently he felt he had taken care of the Nancy situation by getting Rob from under his roof, and so far as I could see, he had.

Lucas paused at a rear corner of the house, to study the way Rob's axwork made the logs notch together as snug as lovers holding hands. While Lucas examined, I remembered him in the woodyard in Nethermuir, choosing the beech worthy for an exle, ash for shafts, heart of oak for the wagon frame. I could not help but wonder what lasts at the boundaries of such loss. At his empty arm ends, did Lucas yet have memory of the feel of each wood? Were the routes of his fingers still there, known paths held in the air like the flyways of birds? When he had looked
Ivan Doig's most recent work is the novel "English Creek." He wrote of the Pacific Northwest diarist James G. Swan in "Winter Brothers."
enough at Rob's logcraft, Lucas nodded and said nothing, which was purest praise.

"woolies," Lucas asked as he and Nancy returned to the wagon. "And the woolies?" "How are the woolies?"

That was a question, right enough. The sheep seemed to be thriving as much as sheep ever thrive. But that wasn't to say that tomorrow they might manage to drown themselves en masse. Ninian Duff had warned us of coyotes and bears, so we were grazing the sheep within sight of us all the time. Keeping them within sight meant walking, walking, walking. I would not say sheep are footloose; they are more like mindloose, absently following their noses as they nibble grass. If there is a thought inside those wool heads, it is about more grass.

Try then to sum up the status of sheep. Rob looked at me and I at him. "There's nothing like sheep," I at last stated to Lucas.

Lucas and Nancy climbed into the buckboard, ready for the reversal of the whirlwind that brought them from Gros Ventre. "Well, what's the verdict?" Rob asked in a joking way but meaning it. "Are we worth the investment?"

Lucas looked down at him from the wagon seat. "So far," he answered, "it's paying off. Pound them on the tail, Nancy, and let's go home."
into the natural order of things. Such as Keene's unblinking reports ("Chapman wagged his tongue all afternoon") on that exasperating and beguiling genus, the neighbors.

"I'm amused to find how its grown a person," wrote Virginia Woolf of her diary, "with almost a face
More to come—description of the neighbors and newcomers to Scotch Heaven
The night of the four riders, I will ever remember.

Rob and I were at my homestead. We had bedded the sheep on the ridge and come on down to wrestle a few more postholes into my eternal west fenceline before full dark. Between bouts with shovel and crowbar, we began to hear horses' hooves, more than one set.

"Traffic this time of day?" Rob remarked as we listened.

"Angus, what are you running here, an owl farm?"

We recognized the beampole figure of Ninian Duff first among the four who rode out of the dusk, long before he called out: "Rob and Angus, good evening there. You're a pair who chases work into the night."

"It's always waiting to be chased," Rob said back. I ran a finger around the inside leather of my hat, wiping the sweat out. Those with Ninian proved to be Donald Erskine and the new man Archie Findlater and a settler from the South Fork, Willy Hahn. Every kind of calamity that could put men on saddle leather at the start of night was crossing my thoughts. Say for Ninian, you did not have to stand on one foot and then the other to learn what was on his mind.

"Angus, we've come to elect you."

I blinked at that for a bit, and saw Rob was doing the same. "Elected, is it," I managed at last. "Do I get to know to what?"

"The school board, of course. There are enough families here-around that we need a proper school now, and we're going to build one. We want you for the third member of our school board."

"Together with--?"
"Myself," Ninian pronounced unabashedly, "and Willy here."

Willy Hahn nodded and confirmed, "You are chust the man, Anguss."

"The old lad of parts!" Rob exclaimed and gave my shoulder a congratulatory shove. "He'll have your youngsters reciting Burns before breakfast, this one."

"The fact of the matter is," Ninian announced further, "what we need done first, Angus, is to advertise for a teacher. Can you do us a letter of that? Do it, say, tomorrow?"

I said I could, yes, and in the gathering dark there at my west fenceline the school was talked into shape. Because of their few years' headstart in settlement, the South Fork homestead and ranch families had a margin more children of schoolable age than did Scotch Heaven, and so it was agreed to build the schoolhouse on their branch of the creek.

"You will haff to try hard to catch up with uss," Willy Hahn joked.

"Some of us already are," came back Ninian Duff, aiming that at the bachelorhood of Rob and me.

A bit giddy with the event, I said, "I can't speak for Rob here, but I'm always game to help." That drew a long look from Ninian, before he and the other three rode away into the night.
It was a morning of the third week of August, still a month of summer ahead on the calendar, when I came in from the outhouse with my shoes and the bottoms of my pantlegs damp.

Yawning, Rob asked: "What, did you miss your aim?"

I almost wished I had, instead of the fact to be reported: "Frost on the grass."

That forehint of North Fork winter concentrated our minds mightily. In the next weeks we labored even harder on Rob's outbuildings and fences, and when not on those, on my house; and when not on either, we were with the sheep, keeping a weather eye on the cloudmaking horizon of the mountains.

On the day when Donald Erskine's big wagon was to be borrowed for getting our winter's provisions in Gros Ventre, my magpie flew first from the gate. "Man, you're sneaking out here and training them," Rob accused. But off he went to the sheep and I pointed my grin toward Gros Ventre.

The Medicine Lodge was empty but for Lucas. "Young Lochinvar is come out of the west," he greeted me and produced an instant glass between his stubs and then a bottle.

"What's doing?" I inquired.

"Not all that much. People are at home trying to be ready for winter. We'll soon have snowflakes on our head, do you know, Angus."

"We will and I do," I answered and drank.

"You and Robbie are ready for old winter, are you?"

"We'll ever be, ready as we can be, we think."

"Winter can be thoroughly wicked, in this country. I've seen it snow so that you couldn't make out Sedge's flagpole over there. And my winters here haven't been the worst ones. Stories they tell of the '85 winter would curl your dohickey."

"I'll try not hear them, then."
"You and Rob have worked wonders on those homesteads, I have to say. Of course I could tell from the moment the pair of you walked in here that you were going to be a credit to the community."

"Credit. Do you know, Lucas, there's the word I was going to bring up with you."

"Angus, Angus, rascal you. Shaking his head gravely, Lucas poured a drink for himself and another for me. "What do you and Rob do, midnights creating ways to spend my money? What's the tariff this time?"

"Pennies for porridge. We need groceries enough to get us through the winter, is all."

"All, you say. You forget I've seen you two eat."

"Well, we just thought if you maybe were to sell the Medicine Lodge and your second shirt—"

"All right, all right, tell Kuuvus to put your groceries on my account. By Jesus, you and Rob would have to line up for supper with the coyote pups if I didn't watch over you."

"We might yet, if half of what you and Ninian keep saying about winter comes true."

"By Jesus, put me in the same camp with Ninian, do you. There's a first time. How is old Jehovah Duff? Still preaching and breeding?"

"In point of fact, Flora has a loaf in the oven. As does Jen Erskine. As does Mary Findlater. If our neighbors are any example to the sheep, we're going to have a famous lamb crop come spring."
Angus, I believe you need to think of a woman."

"I do, do I." Truth known, on my mind right then was the visit I was going to make to Rango's necery as soon as I was finished with other provisioning. "Along any particular lines, do you recommend?"

"I'm talking now about a wife. All right, all right, you can give me that look saying I'm hardly the one to talk. But the situation of Nancy and myself is--well, not usual." That was certainly so.
"That's another country, our Rob. The first bright mare who decides to twitch her tail at Rob, she'll have him. He's my own nephew, but that lad is sufficiently in love with himself that it won't much matter who marries. Whoever she is, she'll never replace him in his own affections. You though, Angus. You're not so much a world unto yourself. You need a partner in this old life."

I hoped the Lucas Barclay Matrimonial Bureau was about to close for the day. "I'm already in partnership with a pair of Barclays," I pointed out, "which seems to keep me occupied twenty-five hours a day eight days a week."

"Mend your tongue. Rob and I'll have you so prosperous you can take your pick of womanhood. But who's that going to be? It wouldn't hurt you a bit to start thinking along those lines."

"And was Lucas in fettle?" asked Rob as we unloaded the wagon of groceries.

"Lucas was Lucas, and then some," I said.
Was it a long winter that first homestead one? Yes, ungodly so. And no, nothing of the sort. How time can be a commodity that makes both of those equally true, I have never understood. Chores took the hours they ever did, and then some. Each day the sheep needed to be fed their hay, and a waterhole chopped for them through the ice of the creek. Firewood was another stint of chopping, Rob and I taking turns day by day.

Rob was building furniture; when he was at that, he had the patience of a three-legged turtle. Whenever I had the chance I would go down to my homestead and work on the house; I had walls, roof, windows and stove, but beyond those, everything was to be done. And you might not think it, but we saw more of the neighbors than ever. People visited to escape cabin fever, and every few weeks Scotch Heaven would have a dance which brought everyone, for even the Duffs and Eskines were not so skintight they could resist waving a foot to a tune. Indeed, it was Ninian who took it upon himself to make up for the lack of a whirling Highlander among us, by crooking his outside fingers high over his head and loosing the cry: hi-i-uh! It was like seeing God giggle.
The balance sheet of men and women was close to even in Scotch Heaven that winter, with Judith Findlater and the teacher Mavis Milgrim now on hand. Neither of them was that much to look at, and Miss Milgrim always had a starch to her that she thought a schoolma'am had to have, but they helped the situation they helped. For that matter, the single time I found a decent chance after a dance to get Judith aside and coax a kiss out of her, she delivered one that I could feel all the way to my ears.
"Angus, you're my favorite man, but there are times when I wish your name was Agnes."

"What times are those, I wonder? February can't be one, surely." A month of snow-white purity--"

"You say snow one more time and you'll be out in it."

A Saturday of February. Rob and I had not been to Gros Ventre in a month and we were preparing to remedy that. Baths had been taken, boots blacked with stove lid soot. The day had been blue and still. Rob's whistling was the liveliest element around. We were putting on our clean shirts when a white flurry flung past the window, as if someone had begun plucking geese.

"Don't be that way," Rob told the weather.

"Robably it's only a flurry."

"It better be."

It was not. The snow drove and drove, sifting out of the silent sky as if to bury the world. In minutes the ground was white.

"That's that, then," Rob admitted at last. "Goodbye, Gros Ventre."

"We'll go twice next time." That was brighter than I felt, for I was as keen as Rob for a meal cooked by Lila Sedge, for a drink poured by Lucas, for talk in the air of the Medicine Lodge. . . .

"Next time is the story of homesteading, I'm beginning to think."

"You're coming down with winter fever. Elk stew is the only
known antidote." Or at least the only supper we had aned we both
knew it.

"Is this still the one Ninian told us to be careful about
sticking our spoons into its gravy, we might ben them?"

"The same famous one. Old Elky, grandfather of beasts."

"And enemy of teeth. Tell me again the price of mutton."

I raised my thumb to him. "One, the cost of a sheep herself."
Then extended my first finger. "Two, the cost of the hay she's
eaten so far this winter." Next finger. "Three, the loss of her
lamb."

Next finger. "Four, the loss of her fleece of wool."

Final finger. "Five, explaining to Lucas that we're sitting out here
eating an animal he put up good money for."

Rob studied my display. "If you had more fingers on that hand,
you'd have more reasons too. All right, all right, the sheep are
safe again. Elk stew, by popular demand."

To cheer him up while I heated the familiar stew, I asked: "Did
you ever hear the story about Methusaleh and his cook?"

"This winter has me to the point where I'll listen to anything."

Tell away."

"Well, Methusaleh's cook got tired of cooking for that household."

All those begattings, more and more mouths at every meal--a couple of

hundred years of that and you can see how it could start to get tiresome.

So she went to Methusaleh and said, 'What about some time off, like?'

'No, no, no,' he tells her, 'we can't possibly spare you, you're too
good a cook. In all these years have I ever complained once about your food? She had to admit he hadn't. 'No, nor will I,' he says. 'If you ever hear me complain, I'll do the cooking myself, for the rest of my life.'

"Well, the cook went away thinking about that. Methuselah was only around four hundred years old then, still doing all that begetting, he looked like he maybe had another five hundred years in him. The cook kept thinking, five hundred years off from all that cooking if she could just get Methuselah to complain. So the next morning for breakfast, the first thing she does is put a handful of salt in Jehovah's coffee and send it out to the table. Methuselah takes a big swallow, and spews it right back out. The cook starts to take her apron off. By Jehovah! he says, and she can hear him coughing and sputtering, the coffee is full of salt! She's just ready to step out of that kitchen forever when she hears him say: Just the way I like it!"

After laughing, Rob went quiet during the meal.
Diaries also have the sometimes perplexing habit of holding life at peculiar angles, and Mr. Nissenson's experimental model is no exception.

"Problems of the craft," mused the Irish peatbog poet Owen MacCarthy in Thomas Flanagan's "The Year of the French," a work which in marvelous fashion contrived memoirs, letters and a diary on behalf of that truer truth, fiction. (Not coincidentally, Mr. Flanagan's image-seeking MacCarthy is a supreme portrayal of an educated person in back-country life during parlous times, that awkward squad into which Mr. Nissenson has
more dialogue to come
Rob went to the window. The snow no longer was flailing past, but clouds covered the mountains, more storm was only minutes away. "Angus, who of your old poets called clouds the sacks of heaven?"

_Undo the silver sacks of heaven, / seed the sky with stars. See every gleam grow to seven, / something something Mars. "I can't think now, which."

"He ought to be shot," Rob stated."
Then in March, this.

"Listen. Hear that?" We were feeding the sheep their hay along the North Fork, on a morning as icy as every other morning of the winter had had been.

"Hear what? The sound of me pitching hay and you standing there with your ears hanging out?"

"There, that rushing sound up in the mountains. That's new."

"Just the wind."

"What wind? There isn't a breath of one."

"Running water, then?"

"That creek is frozen stiffer than I am."

"Creature, maybe?"

"Making a noise that size? We'd better hope not."

The sheep began to raise their heads from the hay, nosing the air.

"They hear it too."

"Why wouldn't they? Their ears are even bigger than yours."

"Listen. It's louder."

"Louder doesn't say it. That's a positive roar." Off came our flap caps, not just for keener listening but because the air strangely no longer seemed so chilly. In minutes the great flowing sound was dispensing itself down from the peaks and crags as a sudden stiff breeze, but a breeze warm all through. A day that had been firmly fifteen below zero began to feel tropical. As we finished the pitchfork work we had to shed our scarves, then our coats. Not until Rob and I talked to Ninian a few days later, the snow already gone from every south slope and elsewhere retreating down
into its deep coulee drifts, did we learn the word of that miracle wind, which was chinook. But riding home from the sheep on that chinook day, our gloves next off, the two of us kept flexing our pale winter hands, one and then the other as if shedding old skin, in that astonishing blowing air of springtime.

Say you are a stone that blinks once a year, when the sun of spring draws the last of winter from you. You see eight houses where there had been two. You see the retreat of the timber on 00 Butte, where we sawed lodgepole pines to build those houses. Were not stones famously deaf, you could hear the sheep of one or another of us, maybe mine and Rob's as we grazed them back and forth on the slopes of Breed Butte. But as it is you see Ninian Duff's lines of fence, straight and taut as 00. You see the Erskine boy, Davy, riding behind the saddle... You see 00's laundry flying from a hayrack, to the disgust of the other wives. You see the mountains over this valley, watching like cathedral walls.
In the after years, Rob always made the jest that the winter with me was what caused him to marry Judith Findlater.

"Your cooking, I mean to say, Angus. Every recipe you knew was elk, do you remember. Judith brought one of her mince pies to a dance and I was a gone gosling."

I laughed ritually each time, but what Lucas had forecast tinged the moment. Rob's route into marriage always came with the for I did see it come, Judith's sorting of us--me too wary, George Frew so gawkishly silent, Rob always pleased to find himself reflected back in someone's attention. When Archie Findlater came to ask Rob for a few days' help with Oo, he may as well have brought the marriage license with him.

"They're at it now," blurted out George Frew, who had a bit too much drink in him.

No doubt Rob and Judith were. I'd have been, in Rob's place, and I have money that says you would have been, too. Yet George's whiskied words set off something in me. I rode home thinking over whether I should have made the moves that would have put me in Rob's place.
More to come—a section about Angus living by himself. It leads into the next page, when he decides to rid himself of the Dantley nag he's been riding and get a proper horse. He rides across the divide to Noon Creek, to the Reese ranch:
More to come--Angus still wifeless and wondering if he's doing the right thing, slaving at the homestead, staying partners with Rob. This leads into the next page:

quick parenthetical comment
from lucas, no help o'civi
It was exactly amid one of those spates, when I had fence that needed to be built and a garden that needed to be put in and bunches of ewes and their fresh lambs that needed new pasture and the permanent topic of how many sheep the bears and coyotes were eating for dinner that day, that I looked up to a buckboard arriving, pulled by Ninian Duff's team of matched bay horses. On the seat beside Ninian perched Willy Hahn.

School board business, this could only be.

Ninian pulled his bays to a halt and announced down to me:

"news, Angus. We've lost our teacher. George Frew is marrying her in a month's time. Maybe she'll teach him to talk."

"So we've an advertisement to write, have we?" I responded. "Come down and come in, I'll--"

Ninian inserted, "In point of fact, Willy and I already have located a new teacher. Haven't we now, Willy?" Willy dipped his head yes. "More than that even," Ninian swept on, "we've voted to hire." Willy dipped again.

I was peeved to hear this. By damn, I was more than that. These two old puffed-up whiskerheads. "Well, then. Since the pair of you are running the school board so aptly without me, we haven't anything more to talk about, now have we. Don't let me keep you here, busy persons like yourselves."

solemnly
Ninian winked to Willy. "The man doesn't see it."

"What's to see?" I blazed. "You two parade in here and--"

"Anguss," Willy put in mildly. "It iss you we voted to hire."
South Fork

In our family there are six of us, Father, Mother, Gramma, Rebecca that is just little yet, Rachel and I. I and Rachel go to the South Fork school. I ride Roanie and Rachel holds on behind. Excepting for horses like Roanie and milk cows the animal everybody raises is sheep. Everybody has chores including children. Rachels' chore is to gather the eggs. Mine is to get in wood and empty the slop bucket. The food we eat is mostly deer, elk, fish, and foul.

Essay by Davie Erskine, September, 1891

Ordain me here and now as the Lord High Kafoozalum and I would be no more surprised than I was to be made the South Fork schoolteacher. Not that there was ever any supposition I was the pedagogical genius the world had been seeking since Jesus went upstairs. Rather, what designated me was that it was too near to school's start to find a teacher elsewhere and the only other person in the vicinity who had stood at the front of a classroom was Mary Findlater, currently a prominent six months into the family way.

"That's hardly my fault," I protested.

"Archie Findlater will be glad to hear that," observed Ninian.

He and Willy proceeded to argue qualm after qualm out of me--yes, this was temporary for the year and they would find someone more suitable for next year, yes yes, they would see to it that I
had help with my homestead's chronic chores of hauling firewood and fixing fence, yes yes yes, they were certain as anything that a change from living with myself all day long would do me a world of good.

But I know as well as you that the prospect of the teaching job pleased me. I have never pretended I am my own best paymaster, so the wage was welcome to help me get out of Lucas's wallet. (By Jesus, Angus, you're the first swamper the Medicine Lodge ever had that's turned out to be a schoolmarm, was his reaction to my new career.) Too, there was that matter of the sheep partnership with Rob and his own set of ideas about how our woolies ought to be conducted, which I was amply ready to let him have some leeway about. Besides, I had come across the bend of the world looking for new, had I? Schoolchildren are newness with the shine still on it.

That first South Fork morning. The Hahn brothers were the earliest to trudge down the road toward the waitful school and waitful me, dragging with them that invisible Gibraltar of burden of having a father on the school board. The children from the other families of that branch of the creek as well, the Petersons and Roziers and Van Bebbers, all lived near enough to walk to school and soon they were ricocheting around outside in those double-quick games that erupt before the class day takes everyone captive. I turned from the window for one last inventory of my schoolroom. Desk rows across the room, blackboard and a roll-down map of the world fastened above, framed portraits of Washington and Lincoln
staring stoically at each other on the far wall. I had helped to
hammered days of nails when
was built. Come
build this schoolhouse. I had been here with Ninian and Willy many
times to tend to our teacher, I had danced on this schoolroom's
a place new to my eyes
floor, mended its roof. Yet I tell you, it was terrify, totally
unknown as I waited for the minute when it would fill with pupils.
My pupils.

For the dozenth time I looked at the alarm clock ticking on my
solitary desk at the front of the schoolroom. This time it told me
I had to ring the bell to begin school, even though a significant
half of my pupil population hadn't yet appeared.

Ring I did.

In trooped the South Fork boys and girls.

I hemmed and hawed and had them take temporary seats until the
others arrived.

But still no others.

Accident? Boycott? Jest of God? Possibilities trotted around
in me until I needed to do what I had been resisting, retreat out
onto the porch and peer up the North Fork road.

Here they came, the child cavalry of Scotch Heaven. The three
Findlaters on a fat old white horse named Snowy. Susan Duff regal
on one of Ninian's bay geldings.

Jimmy Spederson on a beautiful blazeface black worth more than the rest
of the Speddersons' homestead combined.

Davy Erskine on his roan with
small sister Rachel clinging behind him.

I let out a breath of thanks. But to show them I did not
conspicuously intend for tardiness to become habit, I stood waiting while they put
their horses on picket ropes. Already there on a length of grazing
tether was the Dantley mare Patch that I still rode, and with all
our horses picketed around the schoolhouse, the scene suddenly hit me as one of life's instants I had been through before—Rob and I gawking at the Floweree outfit's cow camp the day we arrived green as peas into Gros Ventre. I reminded myself I was greatly more veteran in life by now, and tried to believe it in the face of what advanced on me here, Susan Duff.

She poised below me as if she had borne the message from Aix to Ghent. "We cut through our lower field and couldn't get the gate open and the top loop was too tight and barbwire besides," she reported in funeral tones. "My father will need to fix that gate." Unaccountably my spirits rose as I thought of Ninian having to deal with this daughter. "Meg Findlater's nose is running and she doesn't have a hanky, and Davie Erskine forgot to bring his and Rachel's lunch." This seemed to conclude Susan's docket, and up the porch steps and into the schoolhouse she marched with the other Scotch Heaven children in a straggle behind her.

I kick myself yet for not anticipating the next snag of that morning, although I am not sure what I could have done about it. My gender. In Scotland schoolmasters were thick on the ground. But here, having a man teacher proved to be an unexpected thought to pupils accustomed to Miss Milgrim. The larger boys were plainly restless about me, and I was afraid little Meg Findlater's eyes would pop from her head every time I leaned far down to bring my handkerchief to the rescue of her nose.

My predecessor still governessed that schoolroom in another way, too. After I had everyone sorted and seated and the littlest
ones were more or less occupied with the new things called books, I started on my upper grades in what I thought was peerless emulation of Socrates, "Tell me, anyone, the Presidents from Washington to Lincoln."

I drew back stares.

There I stood wondering what had taken their tongues, until Susan Duff informed me that it was the practice of Miss Milgrim to tell the pupils such matters as the Presidents to Lincoln, while they listened.

"That's as may be, Susan. But I look very little like Miss Milgrim, don't I, and so I need to do things my own way. Now who'll tell the Presidents, Washington to Lincoln?"

A silence deep as a corner of eternity. As the silence yawned on, my only immediate hope was Susan again. But a look at her told me she had lent me all the instruction she currently intended to.

I despaired and was starting to reach for the chalk and begin listing Presidents, anything to stir this schoolroom, when I heard: "Hickory Jackson."

I turned, blinking. Davie Erskine was regarding me with a helpfulness that managed to be vague and earnest at the same time. I'd made mental note to share my lunch with him and his little sister Rachel; this opening effort of Davie's resolved me to give them it all. Taking my mute surprise for encouragement, the boy visibly searched around in his head some more. After a while:

"Quincy Adams."

Yet another Davie spell of thought—Shakespeare could have
written a couple of acts during this one--and:

"Some other Adams."

I was desperately debating within myself whether to shut off this random trickle of Presidents, try to suggest some order into it, or what, when Davie's thought-seeking gaze lit on the wall portraits.

"Abe Lincoln," he announced to us. "George--"

It was too much for Susan Duff. Up shot her hand.

"Washington, John Adams, Jefferson," she launched,

"Madison, Monroe, John Quincy Adams--"

That tiny box of school, on the universe's ocean. How could we in there hope to know enough to get by on, let alone improve the race at all?

I doubt seriously that, when that year's fractions of schooling are added up, any of my South Fork pupils learned nearly as much as I did. There I stood, newly minted teacher of such topics as the history of the United States of America—with my Scottish schooling which had instructed me thoroughly in the principal events from Robert the Bruce to the Union of the Crowns. My daily margin of American history over my pupils was the reading I'd done the night before. Fortunately not all the subjects were as lionized as history, fortunately.

Even in America lessons in handwriting were lessons in handwriting, fortunately, and reading was reading. And spelling was spelling, except that when harbor arrived to this side of the ocean it arrived as harbor, tire as tire, theatre as theater, and countless other joggled vowels.
In our family there are six of us, Father, Mother, Grauma, little yet, Rachel, and I and I.
But geography. The grief of American

When it came to geography, my pupils and I had to be strange pickles together. In that schoolroom of mine were children born in Bavaria and Scotland.
and Norway and Alsace-Lorraine, and others who never had been
farther in the world than Cros Ventre.

Our sole veteran traveler of the continent we were on was
Jimmy Spedderson, seven

who

years of age, had lived in Missouri, Kansas, North Dakota, Manitoba
and now Montana—a life like a skipping stone. Whatever the
roll-down map of the world proclaimed, every one of us there came
and knew only the haziest about anyone else's
from a different earth. For me, terra incognita was the 99% of
Montana where I had never been. I could instruct my pupils
perfectly well that Thomas Carlyle—he of I don't pretend to
understand the Universe; it's a great deal bigger than I am—origi-
ginated at Ecclefechan, pronounced Eckle-FECK'n, county of Dumfries
in southmost Scotland, near to Carlisle and the Solway Firth. But I
had to learn along with them the sixteen counties of Montana, the
town names of Ekalaka, Wibaux, Saco, Missoula, Shawmut,


One geographic inspiration I did have, the piece of the planet
that stayed with me as no other, the Atlantic. The Hahn boys and the
three Findlaters and Daniel Rozier and Susan Duff and Davie and Rachel
Erskine also all remembered crossing the ocean. I strive to have them
make the other pupils understand that feat of crossing, and to hold it
in their own minds ever and ever. And got more than I bargained for
Hope, spirit, deftness, kindness, tolerance, passion; I didn't know if those were the neighborhoods on a phrenologist's skull map, but they would be on my ideal one. This impossibly mysterious process of patterning minds. How do we come to be the specimens we are, tell whoever me that, mix woever can.

each head that I as teacher was to make into a literate and numerate
when Jenny Findlater hesitantly raised her hand and asked if when I was on the ocean, was I scared any?

"Jenny, I was," I said to Daniel's smirk and the careful gazes of all the others. "An ocean is dangerous enough to be afraid of. As are the rear hooves of our horses out there, and blizzards, and just a number of things in life. But we try to use our judgment and be afraid only when it's worth it, don't we, and then only as much as we have to be. Is that how it was with you when you were on the ocean?"

Jenny's vigorous nod carried me from that trouble.

Thank heaven arithmetic is a neutral country. I put addition and subtraction and multiplication and division into my pupils like nails into a shingle roof, pound pound pound pound. Here was once when Scotland came back to help me out, for when I had been pupil teacher under Adam Willox in Nethermuir he made arithmetic my particular topic: They can become literate from me, Angus, and learn to be numerate from you.

So maybe it was numbers alone that kept me, that school year, from riding into the Duff homestead and saying Ninian, start advertising for someone else, this is beyond me. Instead, day upon day I ransacked my brain for how Adam Willox had done things in his
Day upon day that school year I ransacked my brain for how Adam Wilcox had done things in his venture school in Nethermuir. Then amended nearly all of that, for Adam never had the situation of the Hahns' dog Booper following them to school and howling by the hour; of keeping track of whose turn it was among the big boys to go to the creek and fill the water bucket; of Einar Peterson's perpetual tendency toward nosebleed and Jenny Findlater's toward hiccups; of having to watch for ticks on everyone including myself.

Of having to deal with Daniel Rozier about the matter of the girls' outhouse.

A country school such as South Fork was not an individual receptacle of knowledge, it was an educational trinity. You saw all three as you came to where the streambed of the North Fork met that of the South Fork and made the main creek--just upstream within a willow-thick bend, the white schoolhouse and behind it the white twin toilets, girls' to the left, boys' to the right. Each waiting to do its duty, they sat there like an attentive hen and two pullets. My problem, or more accurately the girls' problem, was Daniel Rozier's fascination with the possibilities of that left-hand outhouse.
It began with garter snakes. Most of the girls were not normally afraid of them, but go seat yourself appropriately and glance down to find restless green reptiles beside you, and see what you think.

I heard out the girls' lamentations, and made my threats about what would happen to whomever I caught at snakework. But the Rozier homestead was just down the creek from the school, near enough for Daniel to sneak back before or after the rest of us, and I never could catch him.

Susan Duff, rather than I, ended the snake episode the recess-time when she stormed out of the girls' toilet grasping a writhing foot-long serpent by the tail, carried it around to the side of the schoolhouse where Daniel Rozier was in a game of ante-I-over, and whapped him across the bridge of the nose with the thing.

Even if she was the avenging figure of justice, Daniel was livid about being hit by a girl.

"Susan-Duff-you're-worse-than-snout!" he screeched. "The next snake I find in there I'll hit you with twice," she vowed in return.

And so only two of the trinity were standing when I rode into sight of the South Fork the morning after that. The casualty naturally was the girls' outhouse, flat on its back like a dead beetle. The bad fact now was that even Daniel Rozier at his most indignant wasn't strong enough to tip over a two-hole outhouse; he'd had help from the other boys. It took Daniel and Davie Erskine and the Hahn brothers, conscript labor all, and me to lift the structure upright.

Two mornings later, the girls' outhouse was horizontal again. By then I knew Daniel Rozier was the sort you could punish until he was jelly and he'd still behave the same. Instead, I opened school that day with the observation:
serpent by the tail, carried it around the corner of the schoolhouse.
"A freak of nature seems to have struck the girls' outhouse."

Daniel

Smirk from Sue to Susan Duff, glower from her to him. "Until it
comes along again and puts the toilet on its feet, so to speak,
chivalry will have to be in force. Who'll tell me the spelling of
chivalry? Daniel, crack at it, please."

The smirk went and confusion came. "Unnnn, ah, is it
S-H-O-V-U-L-R-Y?"

"Closer than you might think," I granted. "Susan, enlighten
Daniel as to chivalry," which she did as fast as the letters could
prance out her mouth.

"Thank you, Susan. Now the definition, at least in this case.
The boys will yield their toilet to the girls."

Little Freddie Findlater, a lad with a nervous kidney, had his
hand up in an instant. "Where will the boys go, then?"

I directed attention to the willow thicket along the creek,
"Like Zeus on Mount Olympus, Freddie, all of outdoors is your
throne." Looks were cast toward Daniel Rozier, but the boys sat
firm, so to speak, on their outhouse position.

Montana weather being Montana weather, I didn't have to wait
long for the propitious day. Squalls were in the mountains as I
reached the cupboard that morning, and by noon there was hard
wind and blasts of sleet against the schoolhouse windows. "I
brought more than I can eat," I confessed. "Daniel, pass those
please, big bag
around," handing him the sack of prunes. In groped his paw for the
first haul, then the fruit began its circle among the other boys.

had time for full

When the prunes began to take effect, and boy after boy trooped
back in from the bushes as if he'd developed icicles, I decided it
was time. "I've been meaning to ask, do any of you have time to
stay after and put the outhouse back up?" Where it then held.

"A coyote can too run faster than a dog, Petey Hahn."

Jimmy Spedderson's contention wafted in through an open window as I was at my desk cramming that afternoon's American history.

"Can't either. Our dog runs after coyotes all the time."

"That's a fat lie. Your dog can't catch coyotes! Liar, liar, pants on fire!"

"Didn't say he catches them."

"See then."

"He'd have to run faster to catch them. What he does is he keeps up with them. So a dog and coyote run the same, see."

"They don't either. After recess we'll ask McAsker."

"All right then. McAsker will know."

McAsker, was I. It could have been worse.
My pupils, my minnow school of new Montana. It was like having a taste, a sample, of all of Scotch Heaven, daylong in the room with you. Susan Duff had bones longer than they knew what to do with themselves, in the manner of Ninian, so that her elbows stuck over the aisle the way his poked wide when he cut his meat. The Findlaters all were marvels at arithmetic. The Hahn boys had cherubic lispy voices like Willy's, you would never suspect that one or more likely both of them had just been in a fistfight during recess. Yet I always watch out not to peg a child according to his parents or older brothers and sisters. Along came small Karen, of the cog-at-a-time Pettersons, and she had a mind like a magic needle. It penetrated every book I managed to find for her, and of my bunch in that schoolroom Karen was the one spellbound, as I had been at her age, by those word rainbows called poems.

When all was said and done, and of course more of the former than the latter, the learning drew down to the pupil and me. And I see now, more to the pupil than me. Did I install history in Susan Duff? No, just carpentered around its edges a bit. Was it my doing that Daniel Rozier could never learn to spell more than half of any word correctly? Dear St. Peter at the Gate, I hope not. I could bring the lessons to the eyeballs and the earholes. Where it went after that I could never know.
At the first dance (someone teases Angus about being schoolmarm).

For all the daily tussle of schooling, there were distinct times when I wished the rest of the world was made of children as well. I had wondered what some of the community thought of having me as a teacher, and I found out when the first dance of the year was held in the schoolhouse. Just after I had done a schottische with Rob's wife Judith, Allan Frew called out to me in a high girly voice: "Angus, aren't you afraid your petticoat will show when you kick up your heels like that?"

Allan stepped within arm's reach of me, which made him blink and think. "Ask me that outside," I urged him, "and I'll answer you by hand." That ended that.

Then there was the matter that fists have never been able to settle. It had to be Ninian to bring me word of that, and I give him full due, he looked nowhere near happy to be performing it.

Then there were those who although not openly against me were not thoroughly for me.

Ninian brought word of that. "Angus, this business about the universe being too big to understand and so on. I'm hearing from a few folks that they would like a bit more orthodox view of things told to their children."

Of anything to be scanned and poked and sniffed in the process of education, this. So far as I could see I was doing the job of teaching as well as I knew how. Maybe better. To have it all snag on a sentence from Carlyle, himself a God-wrestler right up there with the most arid of them—it put my blood up.
"Ninian, I can't get into that. You can say you just want a bit of orthodoxy, but there's my-doxy, your-doxy, this-doxy, that-doxy. They're all somebody's orthodoxy. I don't notice Willy with you. Has he been saying I don't trot Martin Luther into the classroom often enough? Then there are the Roziers. I can invite the Pope from Rome to please them, too, of course?"

"Angus, I've troubled myself with this. The matter was simpler when we were over across in Scotland."

"Oh, was it? Then you don't hold with the fellow who said the history of Scotland is one long riot of righteous against righteous."

"Now, don't start."

"You can fill your children with funnels of it at home, as far as I'm concerned. But I won't do it for you here at school. If you want a kirk school, then you'd better sack me and find yourself a preacher."

Ninian looked more bleak than I'd ever seen him, which is saying a lot.

"Ay, well. That's your last word, then?"

"It's even the one before that."

"Angus, we'll leave this where it was. I'll go and tell them I
The long beard moved on Ninian's chest as he shook his head and told you. "I know it's not easy for you. They don't need to know how hard of hearing you can be."

And then there was Rob.

"You know you're demented to be spending yourself there in the school," he informed me when I first went to Breed Butte to inform him. He said it smiling, but I could tell he more than half meant it. "Of course," he went on, "that almost goes without saying, about anyone as redheaded as you are. But--"

"--you'll be glad to say it for me even so," I finished for him.

"And here I thought you'd be relieved to know there'll be a solid mind at the school for all the Barclays that seem to be on the way," Judith being notably along in another pregnancy.

"Solid is one word for it. Thick is another. Angus, man, you're missing a golden chance by not coming in with Lucas and me on more sheep.

With prices down where they are, we can buy enough woolies to cover this country from here to there."

""
"If you and Lucas want to be up to your necks in sheep, that's your matter. I have all I can handle and still take the school. And there's where I have a proposition for you, if your ears are ready."

next  's    after the end of school,
My offer was to provide the hay, a summer job I could manage to do, shared the coming spring for all of our 6000 sheep if Rob would lamb them with his and Lucas's bands. He looked the proposal over from every angle--he was getting
We. Lucas and thee and his money make three, I thought to myself. But said: "If you and Lucas want to be up to your necks in sheep, that's your matter. I have all I can handle and still take the school. And there's where I have a proposition for you, if your ears are ready."

My offer was to provide the hay, a next summer's task that I could manage to do after the end of school, for all of our shared sheep if Rob would lamb them this coming spring with his and Lucas's bands. He looked the proposal over from every angle—he was getting surprisingly like Ninian in that—and at last said he guessed he could go along with such an arrangement. "But you're missing opportunity," he reiterated, "passing up Lucas's pocket this way when he has it open. Don't say I never told you."

"Rob, I never would."
So, without meaning to--there was no Greenock dock at the mouth of the North Fork valley, no green-funneled emigrant ship hawsered in the clear ripples of the South Fork--I had become a divided citizen again. Between the homesteader families and their children. Between sheep enterprise with the pair of Barclays and my own homestead. Between my homestead and my school. Sew a flounce of several more hours onto each day and maybe then I'd have had almost enough time for all those. As it was, I knew I was skimping everything else for the sake of the school, for my effort to be all the teacher I could, but I saw no other way.

Say it better, wanted no other way. A year is not forever, I told my other consciences. Zephyrs from the latitudes of learning begin but in aspiration, I quoted old Carlyle's universe, and came down the wind each morning to the South Fork.
Flora Duff could quote more Burns than I could, and so she had taught Susan "Flow gently, sweet Afton," etc. (Everybody chimes in on the chorus.)

Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes,
Flow gently, I'll sing thee a song in thy praise;
My Mary's asleep by thy murmuring stream--
Flow gently, sweet Afton, disturb not her dream.

Some zephyrs needed more of my coaxing breath than others.

Songtime each week hinged on whatever Burns was in my mind just then and wherever Susan Duff's fine clear voice led us. Neither schedule was much my choice. But a thousand hymns had given Susan a voice, even I had to admit, and I'd found it was like pulling teeth to draw song suggestions from my pupils, even though the schoolyard often rang with one chant or another. Children are their own nation and they hold their anthems to themselves. Ritualy, though, I tried to pry music out of them:

"You're like a school for the mute today. Now who'll tell, please, what we can sing next?"

"I know one, Mr. McCaskill," piped Davy Erskine, standing and swallowing a number of times. Here was surprise.

"Do you, Davy? Can we hear it now?"

Another salvo of swallows. Then out quavered:
"I came down from Cimarron, a looking for a job
riding for the outfit they call the Jinglebob.
The boss told me "Stranger, let's have ourselves some fun. 
Come and throw your saddle on our horse called Zebra Dun."

Oh, that old zebra dun,
that bucking son of a gun,
a-pitching his walleyed fit,
while upon him I did sit.
The punchers came and gathered, laughing up their sleeves counting on their zebra bronc to do just what he pleased. And when I hit the saddle, old Dunny quit this earth went right up to try the sky, for all that he was worth.

Susan Duff was wrinkling her nose at Davy's minstrelsy. But as soon as I gave her a severe look, she joined in the chorus with Davy and me, and the rest of the children followed her. Onward Davy warbled with his verses:

Old Dunny pawed the moon and passed right by the sun
He chased some clouds a while then came down like a ton.
You could see the tops of mountains under our every jump
But I stayed tight upon his back just like the camel's hump.

We bucked across the prairie, scattered gophers as we went kicked the cook and stewpot right through the boss's tent.
But when the fray was over and Zebra done all he did
No doubt was left in this world: that outlaw I had rid.

The boss whooped hurrah! and threw the hat high off his head
He shook my hand until it ached and here is what he said:
'If you can toss the lasso like you rode old Zebra Dun
You're the man I have looked for since the year of one.'
"Davie Erskine, that was--remarkable." It was more than that. There were days when Davie was so drifty he could scarcely remember how many fingers he had. "And where did you learn that tune?"

"From Mr. Fox and Mr. Mitchell." I had to expend a long moment to translate Mr. Fox and Mr. Mitchell: the riders Perry and Deaf Smith. They took supper with us, when they were looking for strays. They said it's a song from Texas," Davy reported as if the place was blue heaven. "Texas is where I'm going when I grow up."

"That may be, Davie. But for now you're all going to Daniel and Mina, 132 Karen, arithmetic. Davie and Susan and 00, your book is page 40. 00, show the others where they're to read, please."

At the close of school, I stepped out as always to watch the children start for home. 00 holding tight behind Susan Duff, 00 Hahn going along the South Fork, 00 and 00 and Davie Erskine up the North Fork.

the walkers up the South Fork, the riders up the North Fork. The white horse of little Finilaters, Susan Duff aboard her bay and Jimmy Spedderson on his black pony with the blaze face, Davie Erskine urging his roan with Rachel tight behind him.

It was Davie I was seeing most of all. Seeing that for the last hours of the schoolday, while he and the others maybe were my pupils, my charges, the inside of the head was territory kept to themselves. I saw older Davys, although their names were Rob and Angus, hearing their own tunes of a far place.
A late afternoon near the end of the school year, Ninian Duff appeared in the schoolroom as I was readying to go home.

"Angus, I've been by to see Archie and Willy and we have made our decision on next year's teacher."

"Have you now?" I'd been more and more aware that my time at the school was drawing to a close, but it made me swallow to hear the fact. "I hope you've found a right one."

"Ay, we do too," he delivered right back. "It is you again. Temporary, of course, just for next year."

I thought the beard was going to drop off Ninian when he heard my stipulation for staying on as teacher.

"Draw ahead on your wages! Angus, who in this world ever heard of a thing like that?"

"You have, just now."

"I'm standing here thoroughly wishing I had not." Ninian in fact was striding back and forth in front of my desk like a scarecrow in a cyclone. "I would need to talk anything of the sort over with Willy and Archie, of course. How much is it that you want to draw ahead?"

"I don't know yet."

Ninian halted. "Angus, what has got into--"

"I don't know yet how much the horse will cost."

"Horse? Where does a horse enter into this?"

"The new horse I intend to buy, Ninian, so that I'll at last be riding something better than my pupils do."
The rest of that, I will let tell itself. A Saturday. As usual, the wind put its breath in my ear as soon as I rode up onto Breed Butte. But not as usual. Instead of reining toward Rob's or Gros Ventre, I pointed patch across the divide of Breed Butte and down, north, to Noon Creek. Her plodding pace reinforced my conviction that buying another horse from Dantley would be like throwing the money in the stove, so I was on my way to do something about that.

Isaac Reese's horse ranch was as far up Noon Creek as mine was along the North Fork, comfortably near the mountains without having them squat on you. And
Isaac Reese had been issued the right face for a horse trader, for he showed no twitch of expression when I stepped off the Dantley nag as if I was a plump hen seeking a chopping block. When I told Isaac my purpose, he only asked in some accent my ears were not prepared for: "How much horse?"

I took that to mean how much was I willing to pay for a horse, and began the sad hymn of my finances. But Isaac Reese meant what he said. He studied me, eyeing my long legs, and judged: "You vant about him high," holding his hand at the height of my eye.

Had you tried right then to tell me how Isaac Reese was going to figure in my life, I would have laughed you over the hill. Plainly this was a man who knew horses. What else he knew—and I entirely admit it turned out to be a mighty total—was as unclear then as his version of English. Isaac was a Dane who had made his way across America with the railroad that was being built north of the Two Medicine River. My bet is that he learned his English, to call it that, from someone else who didn't speak it. It was Isaac who would make famous a Noon Creek winter day when the temperature rose from twenty below to zero by observing, "Der t'ermometer fall up dis morning."

What high horse, no question about that. The horse Isaac Reese led out for me was a tall rean, the top of his shoulder threat high to me as prescribed by Isaac. He was a tall gelding of a striking strong brown color odd in a horse, remindful of dark gingerbread. Maybe I was no great rider, but at the wheel shop in Nethermuir I had seen enough horses pass through to fill a corner of Asia, and I thought something here was a handsome horse. I stepped closer to admire the steed and companionably rubbed his velvet neck while asking Isaac: "What's
his name?"

"Skorp Yun," Isaac informed me. That had a pensive homely Scandinavian ring to it, and I was on the verge of asking what it translated to. When it came clear to me.

"His name is Scorpion?" I verified, stepping promptly back to where I had begun.

There ensued from Isaac a scrambled-egg explanation that the horse was titled not for his personality but for the brand on his right hip, a script \textit{M--M}. Isaac's explanation of the brand sounded to me as if the horse originated on a ranch which belonged to the Mikado. Later Lucas clarified that it was the brand of the Mankato Cattle Company in North Dakota, and "No, Angus, I wouldn't know either what a Mankato horse is doing six hundred miles from home, nor would I ask into the matter as long as I had a firm bill of sale from Isaac."

While I was making up my mind about Scorpion, Isaac Reese was eyeing my colossal saddle on the Dantley nag. He inquired dubiously, "Do you came from Texas?"

"No, not quite that bad. How much do you want for this allegorical horse?"
MORE TO COME: quick summary of Argus's second year as teacher, largely ruminative, maybe using a few musing themes along these lines:

Games sometimes were season for weeks. The girls would be at (peevers) and the boys incessantly playing freight wagon with boxes along the cut bank of the creek, then abruptly tag and ante-I-over would be all the fashion. Never calm but forever interesting.
This time, it was an entire month before the end of school when Ninian made his appearance in my schoolroom.

"Ninian," I inquired when he had done rehiring me again, "did you ever see the word temporary in a dictionary?"

"Angus, we know this asks much of you, to take the school again. But just for next year."
"One more sun," sighed the king at evening, "and now another darkness. This has to stop. The days fly past us as if they were racing pigeons. We may as well be pebbles, for all the notice life takes of us or we of it. No one holds in mind the blind harper when he is gone. No one commemorates the girl who grains the geese. None of the deeds of our people leave the least tiny mark upon time. Where's the sense in running a kingdom if it all just piffles off into air? Tell me that, whoever can."

"If you will recall, sire---"

That particular day of the last week of my second South Fork year, I perched myself on the waterbucket stand at the rear of the classroom while Karen Peterson, small but great with the occasion of this, sat at my big desk reading to us from the book of stories. In the trance of Karen's reading, even Daniel Rozier only squirmed ritually, and I took pleasure in seeing those still rows of oh so familiar heads in front of me.

Adam Willox, did you ever have your moments of phrenology there in your Nethemuir school? Try to test what seemed to be in those capacities they looked from the back young heads with the way their crowns looked? I swear to heaven Susan Duff could have ruled France with the crown of her head.

How such chestnut lustre and precise flow of tress had derived from old dustmop Ninian was far beyond me. But Davie Erskine's crownhair flopped in various directions and no definite one, and that seemed distinctly the hair... Davie Erskine's crown was shaggy and DO, and that was very Erskinian. But then there was the bold round crown of Eddie Van Bebber, so that you'd have thought half the brains of the human race were packed under there, and was only barely bright enough to sneeze. (draw on phrenology chart?)
"Why is it that the moon keeps better track of itself than we manage to? And the seasons put us to shame, they always know which they are, who's been, whose turn now, who comes next, all that sort of thing. Why can't we have memories as nimble as those? Tell me that, whoever can."

Sire,

"If you will recall--"

Hope, spirit, deftness, kindness, tolerance, passion; I didn't know whether those were the main neighborhoods on a phrenologist's skull map, but they were on my ideal one as I studied those South Fork and Scotch Heaven heads in front of me. Each, a head that I as teacher was to make into a literate and numerate mind. The impossibly mysterious process of patterning minds, though. How do we come to be the specimens we are? Tell me that, whoever can.

"Oblivion has been the rule too long. What this kingdom needs is some, umm, some blivion. There, that's it, we need to become a blivious people. Enough of this forgettery. But how to do it, it will take some doing. What's to be done? Tell me that, whoever can."

"If you will recall, sire, this morning you named a remembrancer."

"Eh? I did? I mean, I did. And what a good idea it was, too. For a change things are going to be fixed into mind around here. Send me this remembering fellow."

"Bring forth the king's remembrancer!"

In time to come, when Susan Duff had grown and herself become a teacher in Helena—I've always been sure that Helena is the better for it—I could wonder if I affected that in any meaningful way. In time to come, during what the fable king would call blivion, I
always remembered more of Daniel Rozier than of Karen Peterson, and in there was no way under heaven that that was fair. In time to come, when Davie Erskine—

But that is ahead of what I need to tell now. For it was in near time to come, next the close future, the school year to come, when the occurrence that was central to the rest of my life happened not in my own classroom but another.