SOON AFTER THEY WERE married in 1883, my parents, William and Nancy Jane Hook Good, established themselves on a Black Swamp farm of seventy acres. In all probability, Dad, then near the age of twenty-nine, was able to make a substantial down payment when they bought the farm. No doubt his father aided financially and helped to provide needed equipment; that was almost invariably the custom at that time and later. I never knew the price they paid per acre, but I am certain that it would appear trivial indeed compared with prices of later times (about 1955, similar land two miles distant sold for $700 per acre). Some thirty years after the initial purchase, an adjoining tract was acquired at approximately $100 per acre, making the total holding 140 acres.

Dad liked farming. That, I think, was a basic reason for his success as a farmer. He was an excellent manager, able usually to get work properly done at the proper time. He had most of the essential know-how, having had sound instruction from his father. He followed developments in agriculture as reported in leading farm journals, and he learned much by observing practices of good area farmers, of whom there were a goodly number.
My father's paternal grandfather, of Pennsylvania Dutch extraction, came with his family to Ohio from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in 1836. Born in 1854, my father lived to the age of ninety-two years. This farm was his home during more than sixty-two years. It was also Mother's home continuously from the time of her marriage until the end of her life, well past the age of eighty-six. Born in Greene County, Ohio, in 1858, she was a descendant of a Scotch-Irish Virginian who brought his family to Ohio in 1813.

They bought the farm from the family of Arch T. Priddy who had "entered" it—that is, bought it and obtained original title from the federal government—in 1839. At the time of my parents' purchase, a number of families thereabouts were living in frame houses. This farm, however, boasted only a log house; but it was something of a de luxe version of that type of dwelling.

Writing in a local newspaper on his ninetieth birthday in 1935, in reference to this house, a son of the original owner and builder recalled: "... There were no persons living... between Van Wert and his (Arch T. Priddy's) home. Farmers came from six miles away to help raise the house. ... In preparation Father went into the woods to shoot some wild turkeys. ... He heard a rustling in the leaves and spied a bear. ... He shot the bear and bear meat, instead of wild turkey, furnished the main dish (for the raising). ... One very cold night (some time after the house had been built) ... an Indian ... asked to come in and sleep. ... A blanket was thrown on the floor ... in front of the fireplace. ... He crawled beneath it and slept until morning."

The main part of the house, as my parents found it, was about 24 by 30 feet. It was built of hewn logs well
fitted together and chinked with lime-clay mortar. Ends of the logs were cut off flush at corners. The exterior was covered with clapboard siding. Wide boards nailed on vertically and covered with wallpaper constituted the interior wall finish. The doors, all handmade, and the trim about doors and windows were of walnut. A deep veranda extended the full length along the south side.

At the east end of the single big room was a huge fireplace that, before my time, had been completely boarded up. Only the mantel and decorative trim, all of wide walnut boards, remained visible. (Old-time fireplaces, wide and deep, with big chimneys, were prodigal wasters of fuel. As wood became scarcer, their use was generally discontinued, and they were closed up to prevent loss of heat from the stoves.)

There had been a time when this fireplace was a most important appurtenance, the center of life and activity in the house. A son of the original owner, quoted in a preceding paragraph, reported that though they had homemade tallow candles and lamps, made by placing wicks in saucers containing lard, members of the family sometimes read by the light of the fire. Often, a quarter of drying beef or venison hung at the fireside. All cooking for the family was done there; corn was parched and potatoes were roasted in the hot embers. In the fire’s genial glow the mother spun yarn, knitted stockings and mittens, and sewed garments for the children. There also the father made for the youngsters boots and shoes, using home-tanned leather.

A tall Seth Thomas clock reposed upon the wide fireplace mantel while we lived in the house. (It was transferred to a special shelf in the new house when we moved.) Winding it just before he retired was a nightly chore.
that Dad never forgot. This clock, with a graceful heron painted on the lower panel of its glass door, which hid the pendulum and the cord-suspended weights, ticked off the family's time faithfully for many years. Towns generally operated on standard time after it was adopted by the railroads in 1883, but rural communities long refused to recognize anything but local or meridian time, always referred to as “Sun Time.”

The big room served as formal living room and parlor. In addition to its simple furnishings it had a bed for the use of guests. There, also, young sufferers from childhood illnesses might be confined. The single room above, reached by a partially enclosed stairway that made one right-angle turn, was the family sleeping room. In this log house we children were born. At that time the wild turkeys, bears, and Indians had all disappeared. Only an acre of woodland remained, cut off by a creek, at a corner of the farm.

Attached to the west end of the log structure was a one-story lean-to, about 16 by 24 feet—the kitchen. All cooking was done there on a large, flat-topped, wood-burning stove. This kitchen served regularly as dining room, informal living room and, during much of the year, as the kids’ rumpus room. Just outside its south window grew a huge rosebush. In June every year it became a mass of gorgeous yellow blossoms. Day and night their perfume pervaded the house. Bees busied themselves there throughout the long days. We youngsters spent untold happy hours gladdened by the color and the fragrance of those flowers.

With three small children running in and out, Mother must have had a great deal of trouble with flies, in spite of cotton mosquito netting over doors and windows. In dining rooms where groups of threshers were eating, they
were often so numerous that several of the hostess' assistants had to stand about the table and, with clusters of paper ribbons attached to long sticks, shoo them away. Mosquitoes plagued us every summer; usually we had to keep smudge fires going if we wanted to sit outside in the evening. No doubt most of these pests came from the rain-water barrels, then our only source of soft water.

The big room of our log house was a wonderful place to play in winter and in other seasons when it was inclement outside. It was cool in summer, having thick walls and good cross ventilation. In winter it was heated comfortably by a box stove (an exceptionally efficient heater) near the center of the room. A smoke pipe rose vertically, passing through a metal thimble in the ceiling above. Some six feet above the ceiling it made a right-angle turn and, after an eight-foot horizontal run, entered the chimney. This long pipe no doubt radiated fully as much heat as the stove itself did.

Being heated by the smoke pipe and by the floor, which, supported by heavy exposed beams, was the ceiling of the room below, the upstairs room was warm and pleasant when we went to bed, no matter how cold the weather. Upon waking some mornings, we boys found that snow, sifting through roof shingles, had collected in little ridges on bed and floor. By that time, however, the room was comfortably warm.

Dad must have found it anything but comfortably warm when he got up some mornings. At night he always had at hand a big, knotty piece of wood that he called a "nighthacker." This he put into the stove just before finally closing the drafts. The tough stick held fire well through the night. He could kindle the embers quickly into a brisk fire by throwing in dry wood and opening drafts.
A few steps from the kitchen was the well with its chain pump, which had a wooden pump stalk extending deep into the water. A few steps beyond the well was the milk house, built of hewn, chinked logs, with an overhanging roof to form a front canopy. Milk houses in those parts were always provided with such a canopy, commonly called a “portico.” A huge trumpet vine overspread the entire outer wall and the shake roof at the east side. The shade of the vine, combined with the thick walls and the brick floor laid on earth, kept the interior cool. Inside, along a side wall, was a shallow wooden trough for the storage of milk and other dairy products in crocks. All water pumped from the well for livestock ran through the trough to a depth of about two inches, keeping contents of the crocks surprisingly cool.

In the settlement of his father’s estate Dad came into possession of a tract of land that included a wooded area of five or six acres. Dad and another man felled all the trees. All suitable timber was cut and split into fence rails. We boys had a hand with the rails, working with the men, using axes, wedges, and mauls just as young Abe Lincoln must have done. In addition to wedges of forged steel we had homemade ironwood wedges and ironwood mauls similar, no doubt, to those he used. In all probability, however, his rails came altogether from large, straight-grained logs, while ours came from comparatively small second-growth white or black ash, much of it so cross-fibered and tough that our rails were quite rough and splintery.

We blasted the stumps with dynamite, burned the brush and the shattered stumps, then plowed the “newground,” as all land newly cleared for farming was called. It is questionable whether any job ever involved more strenuous
muscular exertion than that kind of plowing did. The ground was interlaced by tough green roots. Many were ripped out by the plow, but the big ones were so firmly anchored that when the plow hit them, giving the plowman a violent wrench, he could do no more than work it free, then go over or around them—dynamite had not budged them.

Near the center of the clearing was a natural conical basin twenty-five or thirty feet in diameter and about six feet deep. Doubtless it was what is known as a kettle hole, formed in the ice age when a glacier laid down at the spot a huge mass of ice with drift surrounding it. Water remained in the hole much of the time, and the ground around it was nearly always wet. At the first opportunity we ran a tile drain in and extended a branch right into that pit. We then scraped in dirt from the surrounding area until only a wide, shallow depression remained. Water never again collected there to remain long.

After dynamiting the green stumps in the newground, we tackled others on the property, about one hundred all told, some of them pretty large. No one regarded this as particularly dangerous work because the dynamite, containing about forty per cent nitroglycerin, was so stable that of itself it could not easily be set off. In the presence of detonating caps, however, it had to be handled with care and common sense.

With a long auger we started at ground level and bored a hole slightly larger than a stick of dynamite, slanting it downward to the center of the stump—into the central tap root when possible. For a large, sound stump a stick or a stick and a half of explosive was used; half a stick was enough for a small one. The charge was primed with a detonating cap and an attached powder-core fuse, then
eased gently to the bottom of the hole with a slender stick. Soft, damp clay was pushed in lightly behind it to a depth of several inches. Earth was next tamped in firmly to fill the hole. The fuse was cut off so that two feet or more extended from the charge. Tools and the supply of explosives were collected in a basket and carried several paces from the stump. Finally the end of the fuse was split and a match was applied to the exposed powder core. Then, carrying the basket, the shooter hurried off to a spot some two hundred feet distant. Soon came a muffled explosion. Pieces of stump, particles of soil, and a cloud of dust and smoke were hurled upward, 150 feet or higher. Green stumps were usually split into segments but rarely blown out completely. Stumps whose roots had decayed somewhat were commonly thrown out whole or in big pieces, leaving gaping craters in the ground.

Swarms of honeybees inhabited cavities in numerous trees in the original forest. Beginning early in the settlement of the region, bee-hunting became almost a profession. To locate a bee tree, a little honey was smeared on a convenient tree, and the hunter settled himself nearby to watch. Soon, a worker bee would appear, gorge itself with the sweet, then take to the air, homing toward the treetop hive. It was the hunter’s job to keep his eyes on the bee, even though that might mean sloshing through pools of water, running through brambles, tripping over logs, or bumping into trees. Once he saw the bee disappear through a knothole or other opening in a tree, he had the cache located.

His sweet tooth may have been clamoring for immediate satisfaction, but usually at the time he did nothing more than mark the tree, note carefully its location, and spot
a few landmarks. He knew full well that felling that tree without adequate preparations to assure completion of the job of removing the honey before nightfall would be playing directly into the hands of numerous eager competitors; given half a chance, bears, coons, possums, or skunks would have licked up the last drop. Bears were known to gnaw for days at the tough wood of a tree to get at a store of honey. Once the hole was large enough, Bruin would thrust in a paw and scoop out the sweet-filled comb, devouring it, together with all bees that might be clinging to it, altogether unmindful of the forays being made against him by the angry insects.

One of Dad’s pioneer ancestors was reputed to have located as many as thirteen bee trees in a single day by following with his eye the homing flights of bees from blossoms. Dad could not have qualified as an expert at this art, but he did locate a bee tree that stood on our farm. We boys accompanied him when he went to cut the tree. We could see the bees buzzing about a small hole in the trunk, some thirty feet above the ground. Dad kindled a fire and piled upon it damp, punky wood to make a smudge of smoke. He felled the tree, and as it struck the ground, the trunk broke open near the hole used by the bees, the break within a foot or two of the smoking fire. The bees poured out in numbers, but the smoke quickly subdued them. Armed with a smoker (a bellows-connected metal box containing a smoky fire), we proceeded to take out the honey, some of which was trickling from broken combs. With paddles and ladles we lifted out the sticky mass and transferred it to pails, altogether six or eight gallons. We sampled the store as we worked, eating comb and honey together. Within half an hour I paid a heavy penalty for overindulgence, suffering
stomach cramps of extreme severity. Old bee men told us that I probably got an overdose of some vegetable poison that had been in the nectar, perhaps from wild lobelia blossoms.

Some years later, when all the trees had been cut from the plot in which the bee tree grew, we planted the entire area to catalpa seedlings, setting the little trees at corners of four-foot squares. Catalpas were widely sold and planted at the time, to grow into fence-post timber. We cultivated the trees regularly, year after year, until they became too large to cultivate. By the time they had grown large enough for use as posts, the entire grove had become a thick jungle of raspberry bushes, grape vines, poison ivy, and seedlings, as well as saplings of numerous varieties of forest trees. This made cutting a difficult, unpleasant job. The catalpa wood made excellent posts. The actual cost to us, however, all factors considered, was probably much greater than the cost of good commercial red cedar posts would have been.

Our experience in this case taught that Nature, which abhors a vacuum, has no greater liking for vacant space on land capable of growing trees, vines, and shrubs. It is astonishing how quickly natural agencies will reforest any ground that is not altogether sterile and lifeless, provided that it is not disturbed by the plow or other implement, or by pasturing animals. Wind-borne seeds such as those of the elms, maples, box elders, poplars, and the like, float in and germinate quickly, often in spite of well-established grasses, weeds, or other plants. Squirrels carry in nuts and acorns that they plant unintentionally when they dig shallow holes and cache them in the ground. Birds probably contribute more to the process than any other agency, distributing widely seeds of fruit-producing trees, shrubs, and vines.