

ca. 1949?

November 8

Dear Mr. Morgan,

I think it might be well if, at this point, I told you what I propose to do or establish in my novel. Then, when you read any further chapters you can tell me whether or not I am making progress toward my goal.

I suppose you might say, broadly speaking, that my premise is that a man is not poor until he finds out he is poor. Or, to put it into the words of my former writing teacher, W. S. Campbell (Stanley Vestal), "Only defeat within yourself can ever beat you."

To prove this premise I mean to use the Brandeis family, stony-upland Kansas farmers, and their neighbors, some of whom were defeated. John had four sons: Hogarth, Lem, Duane and Joel. The mother dies in the beginning of the book, in the year 1920. Faced with the unexpected task of rearing his sons single-handed, John found that the necessity of seeing to their physical needs absorbed most of his time. He was a silent man, an imperturbable and stern rock, and his training was more by example than by counsel. Like most farm youngsters, at least of that period, they were self-sufficient because they had to be. They learned frugality from the frugality of the land.

The war years had been good. Even on these stony upland acres there was "a little over" the taxes. But after the 1920 price drop in farm commodities The Taxes became, to Joel Brandeis at least, an unseen monster like the dragon in his books that exacted its yearly toll from the youth of the community. Until "making the taxes" became the sole end and aim of the year's work. For as the twenties ticked off the taxes became more and more and the cash became less and less...But no one complained or felt "put upon" then. The economies they practiced were those they had always known.

