MY OLD KENTUCKY HOME

Thomas H. Rogers

The roads were good going down through Indiana. They seemed new in those days; perhaps they were new, new ribbons of white concrete laid straight across the black farmland. We made good time down through Lafayette to Indianapolis. We were slowed up there, but we gained speed once we were through the city. It never occurred to me then that my father was a fast driver, but he was. Years later I remember him giving an exclamation of surprise when a car passed us. "First time I've ever been passed on the road," he remarked, and thinking back I could see it was true. He drove carefully, but on the open road between towns we really made time, I sitting in the back alongside my sister, enjoying the rush of air and the feeling of speed. I would daydream: *we are surging south in our powerful Buick*, I would say to myself. I liked the word surge. *We are surging along the highway in our dusty gray car.* And surge we did, down through Indiana to the river.

Generally we crossed the river at Madison. Then we were on the old, high-crowned, winding roads of Kentucky, but my father didn't let up much even then, because now we were nearing journey's end. He whipped us around bends and over hills as though we were still on the flat, straight roads of Indiana, and it was during this part of the trip that I always got carsick. I would have recovered, however, by the time we were close to Danville. I could sit up then and begin to pay attention as we entered town, coming in along the Harrodsburg Pike, past the Hundley's place, past the Gentry Caldwell's, past Cousin Fox Caldwell's, then under the railway where honeysuckle always seemed to be in bloom in the cutting. Then we would be on Maple Avenue where I could recognize the Nicholas McDowell house, and the white

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house where father lived when he was a boy, and the old Fox house where my great-grandfather grew up. Next we turned onto Lexington Street and passed the Van Winkle's and Isabelle Caldwell's, and then we turned again and I would see the white bungalow where Grandmother and Auntie lived at 151 St. Mildred's Court.

Every arrival was like every other arrival. It was always late afternoon, and Grandmother and Auntie were always on the porch expecting us, and as our powerful Buick surged to a stop in front of their house, they would rise and stand together at the top of their porch steps, raising their arms in welcoming gestures. We had made it again, and in time for supper.

I usually made a point of kissing Auntie first because I felt sorry for her. I thought she was neglected. It was really Grandmother we were all most looking forward to seeing. Grandmother was much livelier and more social than her sister, aside from the fact of being easier to talk to because she wasn't deaf. So I kissed Auntie first, and then Grandmother, and then when everyone had kissed everyone else we would all enter the house with its little-old-lady smell of powder and waxed furniture and southern cooking. And there in the parlor I would see Uncle Thomas Hammond Gist hanging over the fireplace, and Aunt Susan Rebecca Gist over the horsehair loveseat, and my Great-grandmother Henrietta Clay Gist over the uncomfortable little sofa. And there were the girandoles on the mantle, and more girandoles on the glass-fronted bookcase, and Aunt Mary Rogers's album on the square table by the door to the hall, and the rocking chair, and the two high-back, low-armed easy chairs, and the little table in the far corner where the radio sat, and, through the archway to the dining room, I could see the sideboard with the HAMMOND COFFEE POT in the center like a silver tabernacle on some family altar with the funny old set of two-tined forks and razor-sharp knives in the standing case on one side and a silver water pitcher on the other—all these relics saved from the great fire of 1897 when Grandmother lived on the farm near Athens in Fayette County and Father was only two years old. He had immobilized her by clutching her legs when the fire broke out in the kitchen, and then the neighbors and tenants came rushing to help and jammed the new piano in the

front door so that nothing more could be gotten out of the house, which meant that all Grandmother's furniture and things—all except these things—had been burned up. And now here they were, just where they always were, and we were back in Danville. Home, though we didn't live there. But it was always home for my father. He could always surprise me by the strength of his feeling for Danville. When my parents were in their seventies, Mother reported to me that they had been discussing where they should be buried. "Well, where do you want to be buried?" she asked, and Father replied instantly, "I want to be buried in Danville next to Brother."

Brother was Uncle Will, who had a farm a few miles out of town in the direction of Perryville. Journey's end always came when we surged to a stop in front of the house on St. Mildred's Court, but for me there was one further and most magical lap of all when—sometimes that same evening, sometimes the next morning—I arrived at the farm. If I went out in the evening, it meant I would be staying at the farm because Grandmother and Auntie didn't have room for me in town. It would be dusk then, or maybe full dark, but though I might not be able to see, I could always tell where we were and what we were passing because I knew the route so well. When we bumped over the tracks I knew we were leaving Danville and passing the Evans place, almost hidden even in daylight down a long, tree-choked drive. Further along, we passed the Quisenberry's on the left, and then we turned off the Perryville Pike onto the Bluegrass Pike, where we would be passing Mr. Ike Lanier's horse farm. The Bluegrass Pike turned sharply where a giant sycamore stood, and when we had made that turn we were beginning to pass between Mr. Robinson Cook's long farm and the back of Mr. Lanier's and Mr. Charlie Oldham's farms. A mile further, after a dip and a swerve, the Bluegrass Pike turned sharply once again, but we didn't follow it. We drew to a stop, and I would get out to open the gate into Uncle Will's front pasture. The car moved forward. I would close the gate, get back in, and we would drive the last quarter-mile up Uncle Will's long drive to where the house stood surrounded by trees in a lot with another gate I would get out to open, only this time when it went through the car would go straight on to the garage while I fastened the gate, lifting it

back into place because it sagged on its hinges. Then I walked across the grass between the water maples past the millstone surrounded by lily of the valley, and up onto the porch and into that house where things changed as little as they did in town.

If I arrived at night, I would see it all for the first time when I awoke the following morning in the bedroom upstairs with the low window sills, broader than any window sills I had ever seen because the walls of that house were so thick. I would lie in bed for a while on those June mornings—we always went down to Kentucky in June—and listen to the country sounds. A rooster would crow on our farm, followed by roosters further off at the Cook's, or at the Oldham's. Then I could hear cattle lowing. Our cattle. The Oldham's cattle. Then more roosters, followed by the bray of a mule, and the startling clatter of Aunt Dorothy's guinea hens as they were roused by someone, Mr. Goode probably, coming up from the tenant house. Then at the back of our house I could hear the hired girl dump a scuttle of coal into the kitchen stove and then go out on the porch. The screen door would slap-to, and a moment later the pump would start. Then I could hear Aunt Dorothy and Uncle Will stirring in the room below mine. In a few minutes Aunt Dorothy, fully dressed, her hair brushed and parted, would be standing one hand on the newel post as she called up the stairs, "Whoo, Tom! Breakfast." She often called me Tom, while everyone else called me Tommy. I liked her for that.

At breakfast my cousin Eliza Clark would finish telling me the things she hadn't gotten in between the time I'd arrived the night before and the time Aunt Dorothy had sent us off to bed. There was a lot of water in the creek this year and we could make a good dam. She had a pet lamb, named Lambie, which we could go feed that morning. Alice Hoppy had puppies. There were two litters of cats in the barn. Uncle Will had bought a bull. "You keep away from that bull," Aunt Dorothy would interject. We could explore the cave this year, go clear through from the sink hole in the hog lot to where the cave came out down near the Goode's house. "You'll get yourselves covered with grease and mud," Aunt Dorothy would say. She sat very upright at the table, good humoredly throwing cold water over everything. "You'll flood Mr. Rogers' corn with one of your dams," she would say. "You'll

be scratched by those wild cats in the barn. We should have drowned half those pups."

Then, after breakfast, Eliza Clark and I would set off, not necessarily to do anything, but simply to walk over the whole farm so I could see that everything was still there and unchanged in spite of the constant changes that somehow didn't change anything. The tobacco barn always smelled sweet from the tobacco that had cured there during the Fall. The corncrib was always exactly what a corncrib ought to be, even after it was completely rebuilt. The cattle barn always smelled of alfalfa and animals, and there were always cats there, and Mr. Goode was always willing to amuse us as he milked by aiming an udder and squirting warm milk straight into the wide-open pink mouth with its delicate white teeth of one of those wild barncats. Even Eliza Clark's pet lambs, who came and went and were always called Lambie, or Lambie Junior, even they were the same year after year.

In the front pasture the forest oaks that had been left when the land was first cleared more than a hundred years before, even they remained the same despite the fact that they were all dying, smitten by lightning, losing vast branches each winter, perpetually surrounded by a litter of fallen wood but recognizably the same. There was one on a knoll that was dying from the top down. A huge spire of dead, gray wood stood sixty feet high, widening as it descended, until, fifteen or twenty feet above ground, the old oak suddenly came to life with a wonderfully round, dense, symmetrical growth of new branches covered with the bright green leaves of June. And at the back of the farm in the middle of a twenty-acre field there was a ring of mournful cedars surrounding the burial plot of the family that had first inhabited the place. The stone wall that had once protected this plot was falling to pieces everywhere. Uncle Will's Aberdeen Angus cattle found it a cool place to lie on hot summer days. They rubbed themselves on the tree trunks and rested among the gravestones, and every year the stones were further askew in the ground. Some lay flat; some had cracked in another place during the winter frosts, but every year, though I could see the changes here, there, and everywhere, I had exactly the same feeling about the place. That was what never

changed. Uncle Will's farm was always The Farm to me, just as Danville was always Home to Father, even after the actual home he'd been raised in was sold, just as The Farm has now been sold.

When Uncle Will first bought the farm back in the 1920s, Cousin Frank Matthew was up from Texas, revisiting Kentucky before he died. Uncle Will drove him out to see the farm, and after Cousin Frank had stumped about for a while he stopped and nodded. "Well, it's good land, Will," he said, "and I'm glad to see it now because I couldn't appreciate it the last time I went through here. I was going lickety-split then on a mule with the Yankees one jump behind me. That was just after we lost the battle of Perryville."

When Uncle Will told me that story I thought it was one of the finest I had ever heard. I could see young Cousin Frank on his mule, looking over his shoulder as he galloped across our back fields. I used to speculate on the route he had taken and where he had jumped the fences, and whether he had crossed the Oldham's farm also, or come on up past our house and galloped down the drive and out onto the pike. I could even hear the cannon still booming in the direction of Perryville. And then I could also see Cousin Frank, an old man now, come back in the fullness of time to appreciate this good land he had galloped across — on a mule — sixty years before. I could never understand why the family that cleared the land and built the house and buried its dead here never came back to see this place the way we went back to Bryant's Station to see the land Joseph Hale Rogers cleared, the house he had built, and the family plot where he lay buried. What was the matter with that original family, the people who built this thick-walled house out of red brick that had now faded to a beautiful pale rose? Had they forgotten about their old Kentucky home? Were they out west somewhere, or broken up, or just forgetful? We were not forgetful. We went back.

On every trip to Danville there would come a day when we drove over to Fayette County to see the Rogers houses and to visit the Rogers ladies in Lexington. These were not my favorite expeditions, but I could see they were necessary. I even liked to visit Joseph Hale Rogers's house and to look at the spring on the Elkhorn Creek where

the women of Bryant's Station had gone to get water the morning of the siege when they knew Indians were hidden in the woods just across the creek from them. Because there was no water in the station, the women pretended not to know the Indians were there. They thought if they went out normally to get water, the Indians would lie low and wait to attack the men when they went out to work the fields, which proved to be right, except that the men didn't go out that morning. When the women came back with their pails full of water, the men shut the gates of the station and then the Indians realized they had been tricked.

After the war—and this was the Revolutionary War, not the Civil War—after the war, Joseph Rogers tore down the old station and used some of its timbers for his house and used the old cabins for slave quarters, but I could imagine what Bryant's Station had looked like during the siege because I had seen the fort at Harrodsburg and the reconstruction of Fort Dearborn in Chicago, and all those frontier forts were the same. Bryant's Station had been like that when the Rogers men were there during the siege when they fought the Indians and held them off and then sallied forth to pursue them when Colonel Todd and Colonel Trigg and Colonel Boone (that was Daniel Boone!) came up with reinforcements for the station. The Indians decamped then, leaving meat still skewered over their campfires, only it was a trick of the Indians, and they were not really fleeing in panic. They had ambushed the Kentuckians.

That was the battle of Blue Licks when Lieutenant Bernard Rogers was killed and scalped and Daniel Boone carried his son Isaac across the Licking River and left him hidden in a cave, dying, because Boone couldn't help and couldn't stay to be with him when he died because Indians were all around hunting for survivors of the battle. It was a bloody defeat. Colonel Todd and Colonel Trigg had both been killed, along with almost all the officers except Major McGary, who led the charge, which was a charge into an ambush. The colonels had been discussing whether to wait for Colonel Logan and the Lincoln County militia before going on across the Licking River after the Indians, when Major Hugh McGary raised his rifle above his head and cried out, "Delay is dastardly. Let all who are not cowards follow me, and I will show them where the Indians are." Then he spurred his horse

into the river and led them all across the Licking and up the hillside opposite and into the ambush where half of them were killed, including Bernard Rogers, but not his brother, my great-great-great-grandfather Joseph Hale Rogers who later tore down Bryant's Station and built his house there, very near the big sycamore tree where Simon Girty stood on the afternoon of the siege when he came out of the woods and told the settlers that they had no hope and that they had better surrender before the Indians and the British turned their cannon on the fort and detroyed it, as they had destroyed Ruddle's Station and Martin's Station two years before. If they surrendered, Girty said, he and Major Caldwell, the British commander, would protect them from the Indians, but if they did not surrender they could not be protected once the Indians had broken into the station through the holes the cannon balls would make. Only it was a lie; there were no cannon, and anyway the settlers were not afraid, or at least not very afraid, because riders had already gotten out of the station to ride south to Lexington to get help, and the women had gone out to get water, and they could hold off the Indians till help came.

"Do you know who I am?" Girty called out to them when he came out of the woods and took his place by the sycamore. They knew him. He was Simon Girty, the white Indian, the renegade American, the friend of the Shawnee and Wyandot. They all knew who he was, and they scorned him. And that was when Aaron Reynolds shouted out:

> We all know you. I have a trifling dog named Simon Girty because he looks so much like you. Bring on your artillery, if you've got any, and be damned to you. And if you or any of your naked rascals get into this place we will thrash you out again with switches we have gathered for that very purpose, for we wouldn't use guns against such as you.

That was a fine speech, better than Major McGary's speech at the Licking River—Delay is dastardly—because McGary's speech had been foolhardy, whereas Aaron Reynolds's had been bold and defiant. Reynolds's speech was the right speech, because surrender would have been wrong. Ruddle's Station surrendered after cannon began to make holes in the palisades and blockhouses at the corners, but in

spite of the promises of the British officers most of the settlers had been massacred by the Indians anyway. At Bryant's Station they knew the only thing to do was to fight, even if the Indians and British had artillery, only they didn't have any.

Yes, it was worthwhile visiting Joseph Hale Rogers's house at Bryant's Station where all these things had happened, even if the station wasn't there anymore, or the big sycamore where Girty stood. There was only the house near where the station had been, and the spring where the women filled their pails on the morning of the siege, and the stone-walled enclosure where Joseph Hale Rogers lay buried beside his third wife, Susan Coons, and his youngest son, Bernard Fowler Rogers, named for his uncle Bernard, killed at the Battle of Blue Licks on 18 August 1782, the last battle of the Revolutionary War.

We didn't own the house or land anymore, but we were welcome there. The Woods were always very pleasant when we turned up to visit, more pleasant than the people who now lived in Jeremiah Rogers's house along the Kentucky River. The Woods had bought Bryant's Station from Bernard Fowler's widow, and they knew the history of their house and of the siege, and they could understand why we came back, whereas the people in Jeremiah Rogers's house didn't seem to know as much about their own place as we did, because that house had changed hands several times since the Rogerses sold it, and it was not as well kept up as the Bryant's Station house, and we were never invited in to see the carved woodwork, but we went anyway to look at the outside of the house because that was where Joseph Hale Rogers's oldest son Jeremiah had lived. He was my great-great-grandfather, and he operated the ferry on the river and ran a flour mill and gristmill, and owned a sawmill and a tannery in the mountains, and a coal mine, too. He had his tobacco and corn and hides rafted down the Kentucky to the Ohio, and down the Ohio to the Mississippi, and down the Mississippi to the market in New Orleans, where the rafts were broken up and their timbers auctioned before his crews set off for home on foot. And when he died, he left that house and farm to his youngest son, Christopher Clark Rogers, but Colonel Robert Rogers, my great-grandfather, bought it from his brother, so

we had lived there for two generations, or three, really, since that was where my Grandfather and his brothers and sister were brought up by Aunt Judith because their mother died young, and Colonel Robert didn't remarry until just before he died.

He was big man, though not so big or tall as Jeremiah or Joseph Rogers, but still he was a big man with a stentorian voice. He could make himself heard anywhere on the farm just by stepping out on the back porch and roaring directions at his field hands. He kept up the ferry and flour and coal business, and he would put up travellers at night even if they had to sleep in the same bed with one of his sons. We had a family story about my great uncle Robert when he was just a boy and a traveling salesman was sleeping with him, and kept saying, "Robert, don't you think the cover's mighty light?" Robert would feel the blanket and say, "Seems all right to me." He didn't know the traveler was asking for another blanket.

That must have been well before the war—the other war now, the Civil War—because Robert was old enough to fight in that one, whereas my grandfather John Rogers was just too young. He stayed at home, except when his father took him to Lexington on market days when Colonel Robert liked to meet with his friends and talk secession at the top of his loud voice. Kentucky was occupied in those days by Union troops even though it hadn't seceded, and never did. Still, there was a military governor at Frankfort in place of the genuine governor, and people could get arrested just for talking secession. Colonel Robert *was* arrested, along with Grandfather, who was just a boy then, and they spent the night in jail together in Lexington, and my grandfather stretched out on the cot there and went to sleep while his father fussed and fumed and paced the cell all night and bawled out his son for lying down on a damyankee cot.

We had many stories of Colonel Robert, who was lame, and Uncle Robert, his eldest son, who fought in Morgan's Cavalry and was captured during the raid into Ohio and held for a while at Rock Island. Then he escaped into Canada, where he took ship and got back to the Confederacy right through the blockade of Wilmington. He rejoined the army and was nearly killed at the battle of Tupelo, where he lay all day weltering in his own blood while the field where he lay changed

hands several times. Afterwards he was nursed back to health, rejoined the army and was with General Joe Johnston's troops in North Carolina when they surrendered at Guilford Court House, the last Confederate army to lay down its arms. And with all this martial ardor, Father said, Uncle Robert never rose above the rank of private. He was just a young man in his teens during that war. After the war he couldn't settle down in Kentucky, so he went out to Missouri and he died there and left a son and a daughter, but we had lost touch with them and didn't even know if the son, Robert Rogers, was dead or alive since he had disappeared for good when he was eighteen because he killed a young woman who jilted him. He called at her house one evening to see her a last time, as he told her father, and when she came to the door he shot her and ran away and that was the last anyone had ever seen or heard of him.

I learned all these stories and anecdotes and many others, and heard them time and again as were driving down to Kentucky, and again while I was in Danville, and yet again as we drove over to Fayette County to see the old Rogers places we didn't own anymore because they had been sold, or left to younger sons, and so passed out of our branch of the family. But they were our places anyway, and we had our history, which was as exciting as any history I knew about, and was indeed the first history I learned. It was the heroic age of the Rogers family with its sieges and hardships and bloody scalpings and its prosperity and growth followed by imprisonments and escapes and last stands and dark deeds like Cousin Robert's murder of that girl. There were jokes like the one about "Robert, don't you think the cover's mighty light?" or about sour strawberries. "These must be the Gandy's," we always said when the strawberries were sour. These jokes often went back a hundred years, and to my mind they had a curious point and significance that went beyond their mirthfulness, which was not always extreme. They, too, were part of the legend. Later, when I read the *Grettissaga*, I learned the Norse farmer-heroes had joked, too.

During those excursions to Fayette County I would be filled up once more with the high, manly traditions of my family, and I would be brimming over with it all when we drove into Lexington to have lunch

with one or another of the Rogers ladies there. There were three of them, all widows. Cousin Florence, Cousin Fanny, and their mother, Cousin Nettie Rogers.

At Cousin Florence's when we sat down to lunch there would be a little pause during which my eyes would rove around the table enquiringly. One day Cousin Florence caught my eye, smiled at me, the only boy of my generation, the white hope of the family so to speak, and said, "Tommy, would you like to say Grace?" My mouth opened, but nothing came out, and I was mortified to hear Cousin Florence say tactfully, "Well, then, Eliza Clark, will you say Grace?" Eliza Clark was a fluent Grace-sayer who could go on till the food cooled. She was not a pious child; she had just been brought up that way, with Aunt Dorothy hammering away at deportment and other grace notes. "Eliza Clark, keep your back straight. . . . Eliza Clark, don't slump. . . . Eliza Clark, keep your ankles crossed." Saying Grace was nothing to Eliza Clark. I admired her, as did my sister and our other first cousin, Aunt Henrietta's daughter Betty. Neither my sister, nor Betty, nor I resented the fact that Eliza Clark was the perfect child, Grandmother's favorite, an almost faultless performer in the sometimes wearying and mysterious rituals of this Danville and Lexington world to which we were only visitors. Later, in the novels I began to read at adolescence, I found prototypes of Eliza Clark everywhere. She was Agnes Wickfield in *David Copperfield* and Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre*. She was a sweet girl, and I loved her, but it was humiliating that I couldn't say Grace.

After lunch at Cousin Florence's there were two chief forms of entertainment for children. If Florence got out her stereopticon, then Eliza Clark and I would sit together for a while and look at sepia-colored views of Venice and Florence. But my right eye is amblyopic; I could get no sense of depth through the stereopticon. Looking at the Bridge of Sighs through it was just like looking at the Bridge of Sighs in Aunt Mary Rogers's album at Grandmother's—a Danville entertainment. Same Bridge of Sighs so far as I could see.

If it was not the stereopticon, then it was Cousin Florence's shell collection with which we were regaled. The shells were more interesting, but they were too choice to be messed about by children,

so Florence would show us her shells herself, pulling out first one drawer and then another of a tall cabinet, pointing out a few specimens in each drawer, and then closing it before I had time to look at everything. Eliza Clark, who knew the shells better, seemed not to repine, but I felt I was being hurried along too fast. Also, I never got to handle the shells, nor did Cousin Florence ever give me any, though she had so many more than I had collected on our holiday in Florida.

That was at Cousin Florence's; at Cousin Fanny's things were different but the same. Cousin Fanny lived in a grand house on Gratz Park with a real elevator in it, which I could ride in, but not alone. Fanny's black butler, James, a bishop in his own church, would ride me up and down a few times, and that was it. I got the impression I was likely to break anything I touched. Even the brick wall around Cousin Fanny's garden was too old to be walked on. The windlass over her well was not to be played with, though there was a rope with a bucket attached, and it looked to me perfectly feasible to lower the bucket and bring up some water. But all I ever did was stare into the well. This was not a great aftermath to the Siege of Bryant's Station, nor was a meal at Cousin Fanny's at all reminiscent of the meat those Indians left skewered over their campfires. Meals at Mt. Hope, Fanny's house, were served by James in white gloves, and though they did not begin with Grace, they ended with finger bowls, which were almost as embarrassing to deal with.

Worst of all, however, were lunches at Cousin Nettie's house. She was the most formidable of the Rogers ladies in Lexington. Florence was quite kindly; Fanny was rather grand and witty, but their mother, Cousin Nettie, was simply beyond my comprehension as a child. She was the age of Grandmother and Auntie; indeed, they had been born first cousins, and then Cousin Nettie married Jere Rogers, and Grandmother married his first cousin, John Rogers, which made them double first cousins, while their children were double second cousins, and I—I had been told—was a double second cousin once removed of Florence and Fanny, though no one ever explained what I was to Cousin Nettie.

It was not the relationship that bothered me so much as the state of mind I found at Cousin Nettie's. I would arrived at her house stirred

by fresh recollections of Uncle Robert's gallant actions during Morgan's raid into Ohio. We would perhaps just have visited the Morgan house down the block from Cousin Fanny's and heard the tale of how General John Hunt Morgan, pursued by the Yankees (they were always in pursuit, we had certainly lost that war) pursued, as I say, by the Yankees through the streets of Lexington, had escaped by riding his horse up the steps and through the double doors and down the hall of his family home, and so out the back, loyal family slaves slamming the front doors on the Yankee cavalry while Massa escaped by the garden gate. The guide at the Morgan house always told that story. So, exhilarated by such a tale, and by Uncle Robert's close connection to such a dashing leader, I would arrive at Cousin Nettie's, only to hear her utter rank blasphemies about Morgan. "They made an equestrian statue of *General* Morgan," she used to say, "and then they didn't know where to put it." Pause. Sniff. "*I* told them to put it in the park facing his mother's doors. They were the only ones in town open to him."

What could one say? What accounted for this contemptuous tone towards an acknowledged Confederate hero? Or for Cousin Nettie's description of General Hood, the brave if unsuccesful defender of Atlanta, who had married some connection of hers? "A mighty pushful man, I always thought," Cousin Nettie used to say, forgetting for the moment that Hood had not succeeded in pushing Sherman around to any great extent. Indeed, just the opposite. I could not fathom Cousin Nettie's attitude towards the war. "My papa," she would say, "had many fine hosses" (that was how she pronounced horses) "many fine hosses. Then one day General Morgan and his men rode up and took them all. Hoss thieves! That's all they were, hoss thieves!" But even that didn't explain it, because why was her father not *proud* to have Morgan and his men, including Uncle Robert, make use of his fine horses? Nothing made sense. You'd think he would be glad to *give* his horses to Morgan.

I would be looking earnestly at Cousin Nettie for some explanation of these mysteries, and one day, seeing my perplexity, she sat forward in her chair and wagged a finger at me. "My people," she declared, "were not like your people. My father was too close to that war to think

the country should be divided." I quailed before that explanation, if explanation it was, for it left me as confused as ever. So far as I knew "that war" was always the Civil War, which was the war she had been talking about, and of course her father was close to it. He had lived through it, but how did that explain why he'd taken the other side, the side different from the one taken by my people? Besides, weren't her people and my people the same people? Weren't we all Rogerses?

No we were not, not at all, far from it, as I discovered when I began to get older.

Every family is a composite of many families as, with each generation, new marriages take place and new family alliances are formed, but as a boy I lightly assumed that when a woman married a Rogers she *became* a Rogers and that her family by a sort of retroactive process became amalgamated to the Rogers family, where naturally they shared our standards, admired our coffeepot, and thought as we thought about all matters of importance, such as wars and revolutions. The patrilineal concept was very strong in my mind. Traced back far enough, and taking in all the families we had annexed by marriage, I had the comforting view that the Rogers family included everyone of any interest from Oliver Cromwell to General George Rogers Clark. I was quite insulted one day when Cousin Florence explained to me that I was not a descendant of that Clark family, though she and Fanny were through General Clark's sister. What difference did that make? General Clark's mother was a Rogers, wasn't she? And that made him and his brothers Rogerses, for though it was true that when a woman married a Rogers she and her family became Rogerses, it did not follow that the marriage of a Rogers woman to a Clark had made Clarks out of us. Not at all. When a Rogers woman married, then a different and reverse process was set in motion whereby she annexed her husband's clan to our family. Obviously George Rogers Clark was able to capture Vincennes by wading through icy swamps breast-high in water with his rifle held overhead because of his Rogers heritage, while William Clark had been sustained on his long expedition with Meriwether Lewis by the virtues of *his* Rogers inheritance. So what right did Cousin Florence have, she with her stereopticon and her shells, to try to cut me out of

my share in those Clark exploits just because she was and I wasn't a descendant? No right at all. In fact, she had better watch her step or I'd read her out of the Rogers family, in which, by virtue of being the only boy of my generation, I was destined to play a significant role. There would be Giles Rogers the emigrant, and Joseph who brought us to Kentucky, and Tommy Rogers who continued it all. So Cousin Florence had better keep in my good graces if she wanted to be remembered as a Rogers.

Meanwhile, what was the explanation of Cousin Nettie's attitude towards General Morgan and the Confederates? Who were her people?

I only found out years later when I was out of college, indeed out of graduate school, and visiting Kentucky after a long absence, staying with Uncle Will, who was a widower by then. Grandmother and Aunty were both dead, the house on St. Mildred's Court sold, and the things in that parlor—that parlor still etched in my memory—widely dispersed. Father had the portrait of Uncle Thomas and the famous coffeepot; Aunt Henrietta had Henrietta Clay Gist, while Uncle Will had the knives and forks, and Aunt Susan had Rebecca Gist. It seemed very odd to find her hanging in the living room of the farm, but as one grows up one learns to accept changes. Children are nature's true conservatives, as are the very old, a fact I observed when Uncle Will and I drove over to Lexington one day to say hello to the Rogers ladies, all three of whom were still perking along. We found Cousin Nettie, then in her mid-nineties, badmouthing the Confederates as ever. She even repeated that mysterious line that had baffled me as a boy. "My father was too close to that war to think the country should be divided." I was older and bolder than I had been, so I asked, "What war are you talking about, Cousin Nettie?" "The Revolutionary War!" she declared. "My father was born in the eighteenth century." I nodded sympathetically. Senility, I thought, further signs of which emerged when she went up for her nap shortly afterwards. "I have to go rest now," she explained to me. "Florence," she ordered her daughter (she was living with Florence then) "show him your shells." Florence said, "Mama, he's not a boy anymore. He's graduated from Harvard. He doesn't want to see my shells." "Oh, well, I'm getting

old," Cousin Nettie admitted. Then, when she was safely upstairs, I asked Florence what her mother had meant about her father being born in the eighteenth century. "Well, grandpapa was born in 1797," Florence told me, going on to explain that David Howell (the Howells were Cousin Nettie's people) had fought in the War of 1812 and felt too close to the origins of the republic to want to see it broken up in 1861.

I felt dazed. Here was continuity for you, here was the living past. General Eisenhower was then the thirty-fourth president, and I had just been chatting with a woman whose papa was born the year General Washington retired from public life, the year John Adams took his oath of office as second president of these United States.

More years passed when I didn't visit Kentucky at all, and then it seemed to me my daughters should be taken down there to be shown the old country (so to speak) while there were still some survivors from the past. So one spring I drove them down when my mother and father were making one of their still-frequent trips. We all stayed at a motel in Danville and did the rounds. Uncle Will was dead by then, and the farm had been sold, but we were lunched and dined by cousins and invited in to see the old houses there. Then, inevitably, we drove over to Fayette County so my girls could see where Joseph and Jeremiah and Robert and John Rogers had lived and farmed. At Bryant's Station as she showed us around the house, Mrs. Wood remarked that they had recently had to replace one of the main beams, perhaps (I thought) a beam taken from the original fort. She sighed. One gathered that it was a constant struggle to keep up the old house, but things looked well cared for as they usually did. And as usual, dogs barked at us outside Jeremiah Rogers's house, and no one invited us in, but we took pictures of my girls standing in the driveway with the house behind them, and then we drove into Lexington.

Cousin Nettie was dead, but both Florence and Fanny entertained us. At Florence's house when my daughters reached for their spoons to start on the soup, Florence said gently, "We say Grace here before meals." Then, rather than put Becky or Susie to the test, she herself said Grace. Afterwards she showed them her shells. I looked too.

They were beautiful. At Fanny's house, while James gave Becky and Susie their ride in the elevator, I looked around the place with adult eyes and found it impressive. There was a magnificent shell-carved secretary, a fine highboy, some early printings of the Heuvel edition of Audubon's birds, and somehow it didn't look to me exactly like the stuff that accumulates in an old family, even in a rich old family. There wasn't *any* junk so far as I could see. "Was all this here?" I asked Fanny. "Are these Gratz things?" "Heavens no!" she said, "there was linoleum on the floor when I moved in." Then she explained that when she married Anderson Gratz she decided to buy one beautiful thing a year and really fix up the old Gratz house, which had been denuded for the convenience of Bernard Morton, the son of Mary Gratz and our cousin Jere Morton. Bernard had cerebral palsy and couldn't walk or talk. He lived in a wheelchair, and the elevator had been installed for him. "I did everything here," Cousin Fanny said, looking around with satisfaction at the result of fifty years of judicious purchases. Then we went into lunch, which was served by James as it always had been, and at the end of which I saw my girls eyeing their finger bowls and then sagely waiting to see what the grown-ups did with theirs.

My next trip to Kentucky was during the autumn of 1977. My father wanted to go back to Homecoming at Centre College in Danville. Since he and my mother were then in their mid eighties, I did all the driving in my trusty new Fiat. And there were other differences from the old trips we used to take, for we went down through Pennsylvania (where I live) and West Virginia, crossing into Kentucky over the Big Sandy River, spanned almost casually by the new I-64. Yet once in Kentucky the past began to assert itself. As we approached the exit for Mount Sterling, I suggested we lunch there, and Father jumped at the suggestion. "Fine," he said, "and then we can visit the cemetery." His grandmother's family, the Gists, are buried in Mount Sterling. "Fine," said I. The cemetery didn't attract me, but I had never seen the town, which Grandmother and Auntie used to talk about when I was a boy.

We arrived in Mount Sterling in the midst of a noon traffic jam and found ourselves a restaurant on Main Street in what had formerly

been a bank, robbed of $10,000 in 1863 by some of Morgan's men, as a historical marker informed us. I was glad Cousin Nettie wasn't around to see that. "Hoss thieves and bank robbers," I could hear her saying. After a copious $1.85 lunch of meat and three vegetables in the ex-bank, we drove out to Machpealah Cemetery to see the Gist graves, which we eventually found. There was Aunt Rachel E. Gist, who married Mr. Turner, and Aunt Susan Rebecca Gist who married Leander Cox. Her portrait, I knew, was then in Louisville, where Eliza Clark lived. And there, near her sisters, I found Henrietta Clay Gist, who married my great-grandfather Thomas Hunton Fox. Her portrait was down in Florida where Aunt Henrietta was living. Uncle Thomas Hammond Gist was not in Machpealah. Presumably he lies somewhere back in Baltimore where the Gists originated, and his portrait, more widely traveled than the others, had made it to Arizona to which my parents had retired. Despite his absence, there was an impressive display of Gists—five generations of the family laid out for our inspection and reflection. Father took a picture of me knee-deep in Gist graves, and then we got back into the Fiat. A few miles outside Mount Sterling he leaned toward me and said, "Now slow down here and I think we can see Blythewood." Blythewood had been one of the main Gist houses. I slowed, and sure enough there was a typical rosy red farmhouse screened by its sheds and stables and barns and trees but nevertheless visible from I-64. We were seeing it from the back, but I assumed that in front there would be a white, Greek revival portico. "Every home a temple" was the motto of those old farmers.

In Mount Sterling my father had seemed to be getting younger and spryer. At one point as I was hunting for a parking place, just drifting around the courthouse (burned in 1862 by the Yankees—Mount Sterling was evidently one of those communities that got it from both sides during that war), Father had shouted, "Stop the car! Stop the car! There's Cousin Caswell's office." Before I could focus on things, he was out of the Fiat and plunging up a flight of stairs towards the office of "Caswell Pruitt, Realtor." After installing Mother in the bank, I'd retrieved Father as he stumbled down that same flight of stairs, a little disappointed that the young Caswell Pruitt he'd just been talking to didn't seem to know where, in Machpealah Cemetery, the Gist

graves were located. "He must be the grandson of the cousin Caswell I used to know," Father said a little dubiously. Then he cheered up, "Well, we'll find the graves anyway," and of course we had.

In Danville his vitality and enjoyment of everything seemed to increase hourly, although he was the only member of his class (1914) to attend Homecoming that year. Still, he knew everyone, or at least he'd known their parents or their grandparents, and everyone seemed to know him. "Hunton!" they all said, hugging him. "Elizabeth!" they said, hugging Mother. "And this is Tommy?" the older ones said, shaking my hand. "I remember you as a boy. I was devoted to your Grandmother." I was fifty then.

That night we went to a Colonel's Club dinner where the president of Centre spoke about college finances. Then there was a Max Morath show. The next day there was a Homecoming lunch at which the president talked about college traditions. Then Mother went back to rest in the motel, while Father and I sat in the rain watching the Praying Colonels beat Sewanee 17 to 6. I feared Father might be overtaxing himself—we were invited out to dinner that evening—but, in fact, I was the one who caught cold and had to sneeze my way through the evening.

The next day we drove out to The Farm past the Evans place, now a children's home owned by the Christian Church, past the Quisenberry's where (I had heard just the night before) "Mary Q" was living all alone surrounded by dogs and burglar alarms because she had been robbed so often. Beyond the Quisenberry farm there was a new intersection formed by a bypass around Danville. A shopping mall had been developed there, but once we turned off the Perryville Pike onto the Bluegrass Pike things looked unchanged until suddenly we came upon six new houses going up in a field across from Mr. Ike Lanier's old farm, now owned by Mr. Joe Frankel. But the giant sycamore still stood where the Bluegrass Pike turned, and the Cook farm was unchanged, and I knew—because I'd seen her at the Max Morath show—that Mrs. Oldham still lived in her house, though she'd rented her land to Corinna Cook's husband. Then we were opposite Uncle Will's old farm, Caverndale as he began to call it once he'd ripped off the wide, flat-roofed Victorian porch and restored the

original columned portico whose outlines in the faded old brick of the house front had so fascinated me as a boy.

No need for me, with my head cold, to get out to open the gate into the front pasture. There was a cattle guard now, but the pasture itelf was unchanged, and still unplowed. For a miracle some of the forest oaks were still alive, while young trees Uncle Will had planted were beginning to take hold. The house itself was hidden as always among its water maples. The barns looked well painted and well kept up. The fences were in good shape. Father and I agreed the current owners were doing a good job. It's not easy to maintain an old house and to keep a farm looking fine. It takes constant work and repairs. You've got to care for a place the way Uncle Will had cared for this farm, which that nameless family never came back to see. How Uncle Will would have enjoyed showing them his improvements—the white board fences, the new seeder house, and most of all that portico I could see gleaming between the trees of the front yard. They should have come back, I thought, the way we went back to appreciate what the current owners were doing. And how considerate it was of those owners to take such good care of our old farms, which, now that I was a middle-aged professor with a cold in my head, I knew I would never have the energy or patience to care for myself. As a boy I had sometimes felt displaced and dispossessed that we didn't own that house at Bryant's Station. Now I was glad that it wasn't my responsibility, that it belonged to the Woods, and not to us. Though did it really belong to anyone, I wondered. Were we not all merely caretakers and guardians of this land and these houses and those possessions which had descended to us from the sacred past?

In Lexington, a day later, the sacred past seemed almost to be getting out of hand as we visited Cousin Fanny. We had been warned that she was in very bad shape, but when we drove up to Mt. Hope, Cousin Florence, then eighty-nine, was there to greet us with the good news that Fanny, ninety-one, was on her feet and eager to see us. And indeed she was literally on her feet, holding herself upright with a walker, but though eager to see us, not quite able to do so because of her cataracts. She was in high spirits, however, and very amusing about her loss of sight. "I get a lot of wrong numbers now when I dial,

but people are usually very nice about it," and she told some funny stories about people she'd talked to in Colorado and Michigan in her attempts to reach her dear old friend Jesse in California. Then she shook her head.

> But I don't know anyone in Lexington anymore. Everyone I grew up with is dead except Lucy Gay, and she's ninety-four. I called her up and said, "Lucy, come to lunch," and she said, "Oh, Fanny, I can't," and I said, "Why not? I know you're not doing anything," and she said, "Well, if you must know, I eat with my fingers now," so I told her, "Come anyway. I can't see so it won't make any difference to me."

Talk then became general, and Father, who had struck me as getting youthful in Danville now began to seem positively boyish as he and Florence and Fanny reminisced about the (very) old days when Fanny had organized them all in lassoing the hogs on my grandfather's farm near Athens—the farm where we had the great fire of 1897.

Lunch was announced as imminent, but then there was some sort of delay that required a worried conference in the kitchen between Cousin Florence and Christine, who had cooked for Fanny for the past fifty years. During this period Fanny took her exercise by going up and down the hall with her walker, trailed by Nurse Jones ready to catch her if she fell backwards, as seemed likely with each step. Then Florence announced that we'd start lunch without James, who had gone out to get some Kentucky Fried Chicken and had had a minor car accident. Christine's cheese soufflé couldn't wait, so we sat down and old Christine served it herself. Then James appeared. He looked elderly and a little flustered, but he had on his white gloves, and Colonel Sanders's chicken was nicely arranged on a silver platter, and one felt a crisis had been surmounted. Nurse Jones, seated between me and Cousin Fanny, leaned towards Fanny murmuring, "Miz Gratz, would you like me to cut up your chicken for you?" "No thank you," said Fanny grandly. She peered down at her plate. "Just show me where it is." I noticed that Nurse Jones was not served wine and that the fingerbowls were unaccountably absent, perhaps because Fanny could no longer see to get her fingers in them.

Afterwards, while Fanny made her slow way back to the little sitting room in front, I looked around the main rooms. Paint was peeling in one of the big parlors. The front door, I knew, had been jammed shut for years because the house was settling again. "It's those trucks!" Fanny said grimly. Still, Mt. Hope was basically in good shape, and obviously going to outlast its current tenant. And who would take care of it after Fanny was gone? She had no children, and neither had Florence or their brother Clark, who died in the influenza epidemic of 1918 leaving a bride—widowed now for sixty years—that they still kept up with: Cousin Fanny Blow Rogers in Tennessee. There *had* been another sister, Anna, who married a man from New Jersey named Case, Judge Case he was always called, and she did have some descendants but none apparently in a position to drop everything and come take care of Mt. Hope. Just living in a house like Fanny's is a full-time occupation for an energetic person. After lunch Fanny shook her head. "I may have to sell it," she said. She hadn't been able to give Mt. Hope to Transylvania College, the trustees of which could spot a white elephant when they saw one, but Fanny did know of some people who had wanted to buy the house ten years before. "And they may still want it," she said, though one could see she was far from resigned to selling. As Florence said privately, "She'll never sell this house. She'll struggle along here to the end." I agreed. Nursed round the clock, scarcely able to see the house and its treasures she loved so much, she would finish the struggle here. And then what would happen to it all?

In Louisville I got an answer of sorts. My parents went flying off to sunny Arizona, while I stayed on with Eliza Clark and her family to nurse my head cold and see the sights. One rainy day Eliza Clark and I drove all over Louisville, looking at the University, at Churchill Downs, at restored Victorian enclaves, and at the house where that great traveler, Aunt Mary Rogers, had lived. She was once shipwrecked off the coast of Ireland on her way to Italy to collect more of those sepia-colored photographs for her album, which I now owned. We saw everything, including the Gideon Shryock bank. Shryock is supposed to have unloosed the Greek Revival style on Kentucky. We felt cold and wet and tired when, on an impulse, we

stopped one last time, quite near Eliza Clark's home, just to glance at Locust Grove, General George Rogers Clark's last home, now a museum. The sight of the house stimulated us, and the next thing we knew we were inside looking around at the remarkable paneling and the restored ballroom, papered with a copy of the original wallpaper. There were family portraits, and a framed genealogical tree—our genealogical tree as it happened, for there at the top was old Giles Rogers. As I saw him there, something clicked in my mind, and I remembered Cousin Florence telling me long ago that she and Fanny were Clark descendants. Ah, I thought, Fanny can endow a museum, this museum if necessary. And sure enough, a moment later, I was looking at some quilts donated by Cousin Fanny. The nice young woman showing us around said, "She's been very generous. She's given us lots of things." I nodded wisely. Then Eliza Clark asked to see a pair of terrestrial globes, donated, she thought somewhat hastily, by an aunt of her husband's. I nodded again. The thing was becoming clear to me.

Every family has its teapot, its pair of globes, its quilts and portraits and dining-room chairs which descend haphazardly through the generations, perhaps shifting from one branch of the family to another, the portraits first hanging cheek by jowl in one room, and then scattering to the four corners of the country while the originals molder quietly in one spot. Then, finally, there comes a maiden aunt who rashly donates the globes to a local museum, or a Cousin Fanny who builds up such a collection of things that it begins to disintegrate of its own weight, just as its owner disintegrates with age. "She fell in that coal scuttle yesterday," Nurse Jones had told me, nodding darkly. One could see Nurse Jones's opinion of life at Mt. Hope. The house would have to become a museum, I decided, if not after Fanny's death, then after its next owners had struggled out their days there. It would become a Gratz museum, and all the Gratz memorabilia Fanny had patiently collected could be permanently housed and cared for by nice young women like these in the Clark museum. And meanwhile, such pieces of Fanny's possessions as would descend to her great-nieces and great-nephews could form the

nucleus of new collections of family things, to be ultimately bequeathed to yet other family museums.

All this seemed like a satisfactory solution, only it left me wondering what had become of the men? What had become of the tall men wading breast-deep in the icy swamps around Vincennes, holding their long Kentucky rifles overhead? What had become of them, the ones who felled the forests and built the houses that people were now struggling to keep up? We could assure the future of those houses by making them into museums with intelligent women to act as guides, but were we not losing something by making ourselves into caretakers of the earth and guardians of the past? My mood changed. I thought, *let us have an occasional fire to burn up these old things, lest the manhood be crushed out of us by their accumulating weight.* Then, quickly, everything began to fall apart for me as I felt myself trapped in a world grown dainty and sterile. By the time Eliza Clark and I left General Clark's nicely restored old house, my feelings had turned completely against the place. *Kill, burn, loot, pillage, and destroy*, I thought. *Take your chances. Do not be afraid of getting scalped by Indians and captured by Yankees and hunted by the police. Get down in the mud and blood of life, and above all do not save old things and restore old houses. Let them go, forget them, do not look back* . . . but there was a line of old Kentucky coffeetrees behind the General's house, and a dry stone wall, and a green field, and as Eliza Clark and I paused there The Farm came back to me as it had been when she and I were children, feeding her pet lamb, building our dams, exploring the cave, and, in the evening, swinging together on the porch, that spacious Victorian porch, while Uncle Will sat nearby in a wicker chair smoking his pipe. I could smell his tobacco, and hear his voice in the darkness saying, "Tommy, this is the best moment in a farmer's life, just sitting here in the evening listening to it rain."

One's impulse towards violence, towards heroism, and towards escape melt under memories like those. I knew I would always look back. I would never escape my family and its past, and that past, I thought, had contained a little violence and a little heroism, but only a very little of each, for mainly we had always been farmers like Uncle

Will, working on our land, sitting on our porches, and loving the sound of rain falling into our fields and onto our roofs. Rain, that in the winter, blew against our thick walls, fading their red brick into the pale rose, that very pale old rose color of my old Kentucky home.