



C H A P T E R 6

MY FATHER BOUGHT THE ENORMOUS AREA OF AROUND 100,000 ACRES at one purchase. The entire lot must have cost him somewhere in the neighborhood of four hundred dollars. That was a good deal of money to pass over at one payment in those days. When my father paid down that great sum and turned and stood in the courthouse door of Jamestown and looked abroad over his vast possessions, he said, "Whatever happens to me, my children will be secure; I shall not live to see these acres turn to silver and gold but my children will." Thus with the very kindest intentions in the world toward us he laid the heavy curse of future wealth upon our shoulders. He went to his grave in the full belief that he had done us a kindness. It was a sorrowful mistake but fortunately he never knew it.

My eldest brother was four or five years old when the great purchase was made, and my eldest sister was a child in arms. The rest of us came afterwards, and were born along from time to time during the next ten years. Four years after the purchase came the great financial crash of 1834 and in that storm my father's fortunes were wrecked. From being honored and envied as the richest citizen of the county he suddenly woke up and found himself reduced to almost nothing. He was a proud man, a silent man, and not a person to live among the

scenes of his vanished grandness and be the subject for public pity. He gathered together his household and journeyed many weary miles toward what then was the "Far West," and at last came to the little town of Florida, Missouri. He ran a store there several years but had no luck, except that I was born to him. He presently removed to Hannibal and rose there to be an officer of the court when the summons came that no man can disregard.

But even upon his deathbed he thought of his land. He said that it would make us all rich and happy. And so believing, he died.

We turned our waiting eyes upon this land, and through all our wanderings and all our good times and bad over continents and seas between, we were possessed with an old habit and a faith that rises and falls but never dies. We were always going to be rich next year—so why work? It is good to begin life poor; it is good to begin life rich—these are wholesome; but to begin it poor but prospectively rich! The man who has not experienced it cannot imagine the curse of it.