

A SKETCH, BY C. K. SEMLING.

The writer has been inclined to question the value, other than a statistical one, of biographical sketches of persons who have no strong, outstanding qualities or achievements to recommend them; of persons whose lives it may be said are spun as small fibres into the never-ending life-thread of human mediocrity. He has traveled beyond the summit of his physical existence, and can find nothing in his life to recommend as a pattern for others. Rather, he is overwhelmed with a sense of the significance of Henrik Ibsen's striking allusion to the "button-moulder" in the "Peer Gynt" drama; that most lives have been deflected from the course intended for them by their author, and that such deflections have been caused by self-sought advantages and by environments. Truly, we are creatures of environments; but just as truly, we are creatures of volition and choice. The writer can not spin out a story worth reading about his own achievements. But he believes that there are independent facts and conditions concerning the life of any common man, which, if rightly told, can be made of some value to coming generations; for facts and conditions are things that touch many lives in common, and, if given in a correlated form, will paint a comprehensive and composite picture of the life of a certain people in a certain period. Such a picture should touch, if possible, all points of the subject, and give due credit alike to the lighter and darker portions thereof. It is with this object in view, therefore, that the writer sets himself the task of writing the following sketch, hoping that some time some little good may be gleaned therefrom.

The author seeks no eulogy in the following sketch of himself, and trusts that no one will attempt to read self-praise into the following lines. He does not wish to convey the idea that his lot in childhood and youth was an unusually harsh or difficult one; for many poor boys and girls have fared worse. Neither does he desire to go into any details of the conditions surrounding his early life except for purposes of elucidation, and only wishes to treat of so much of the facts as will in a general way convey a truthful picture, not so much for the purposes of personal history as for the purposes of contrast with present prevailing conditions. The poor are yet poor, but there is a difference, and it is only right that present and future generations should know and understand what has gone before. Neither does the author wish to convey the idea that his lot was cast in actual poverty; it was not, for his parents would sooner have died of hard labor than ask or receive alms or charity. There is a distinction between being poor and being a



C. K. SEMLING AND FAMILY.

pauper. The picture intended to be conveyed, therefore, aside from the vital statistical facts, is that of an average immigrant family of peasant folk, and the attempts of the members of this family to adjust themselves to the new conditions in this our land of freedom and opportunity, and to "get on," as you may say.

C. K. Semling was born in the parish of Vestre Slidre, in a civil sub-division (or, as it is termed in the Norwegian vernacular, *bygd*) named Valdres, it being in the diocese of Christiania, Norway, on June 8, 1865, of the parents Ole Jacobsen and Marit Iversdatter. His father, Ole Jakobsen, a son of Jakob and Anne Moe, was born on a *gaard* named Moe in the same civil sub-division as above stated, in November, 1817, received a good education according to the times and his station in life, worked at farm labor and learned the trade of a painter. The painter's trade at that time in Norway had an artistic as well as a commercial value because it involved decorating of the wooden house-furnishings of the more opulent class of the farmers, or *bönder*, such as dressers, trunks, tables, bowls, pitchers, plates, and like articles, it being remembered that the tableware was largely woodenware, and it was considered good taste to embellish these with highly colored flowery decorations and sometimes with the name of the owner and the date when the article was made. Very often a little snatch of a well-known song, a verse or a proverb, was placed upon the drinking bowls and cups, much as is now the custom to decorate *steins*. It was also customary to paint the inside of residences, most of the exterior of buildings on the farms or *gaards* being of hewed logs, which required no painting. Many churches, however, were built of boards or were board covered, and required painting, as did also their interior. Thus Ole Jakobsen's trade took him into various places of Norway, often far away from home. His trade involved the thorough understanding of the mixing of colors, as the stock of material included only the basic lead, oil and coloring matter. It included also the ability to write a meticulous hand, which Ole acquired better than most. Ole Jakobsen, after his confirmation into the Lutheran church, which occurred in his sixteenth year, worked on a *gaard* called Kvil, his emolument being as per contract for a twelve month the sum of one dollar and a vest made of the home-spun material called *vadmel*, servants being usually paid in clothing (home-made) as well as in coin. Working thus, he was at times afforded the opportunity of improving his knowledge of books by coming in contact with schoolmasters, and thus acquired a far better knowledge of grammar, reading and writing than the average farmer boy, or

bondegut, of his time; so that at times he officiated as parochial school teacher. This was not a small accomplishment for a *husmandsgut* in those days when the social scale was more exacting than it is now in Norway.

Marit Iversdatter was born of the parents Iver and Anne Bakken, on a place called Bakken, being attached to the *gaard* Semelinge. It is from the latter name that the issue of this couple have adopted the name Semlinge. This name, like every *gaard* name, has a meaning. The author of this sketch wrote to the well-known Norwegian ethnologist and poet, Ivar Aasen, for a definition of the name, and was informed that it dates back to the time when the Old Norse language (which is now the Icelandic) was in vogue; that it is formed of two words: *semel*, meaning "doe," and *enge* or *eng*, meaning "a sheltered meadow," and that this name was attached to the place for the evident reason that the female deer mothered her young there.

Marit's father, who was a blacksmith, died when she was a very young girl. There was an older brother, Haaken, who died in Bratsberg, Fillmore county, this state, in 1880, and a younger brother, Ivar, by a second marriage of her mother, who, after coming to America, settled in Becker county, Minnesota. She was early accustomed to do a man's work on the farm, and for a time before her marriage worked as dairy maid or *budeje* on some of the largest *guards* in Vestre Slidre, such as Fossem and Fere. There she received higher wages than most men, being paid eighteen and even as high as twenty dollars (*specie daler*), together with certain working clothes, for twelve months' labor. She had many girls working under her as *underbudeje*, who, however, were not treated so lavishly in the matter of compensation as was Marit, some working for little more than their keep. She received only enough schooling to pass her for the conventional confirmation in the church, which did not include "the more genteel art of writing," that being thought at the time quite superfluous for girls. She was a woman of strong body as well as of mind, schooled in the greatest frugality and taught to look upon hard work as the only *open sesame* to unlock the wealth of the world. She was born in 1824 and married Ole Jakobsen when she was twenty-four years old, he being seven years her senior. They resided on the *plads* named Bakken (meaning "the hillside"), attached to Semelinge or Semelenge, as it was formerly written, until the winter of 1867, when they left for America, arriving at Rushford, in Fillmore county, Minnesota, in the month of June of that year; and with them came the following children: Anne, sixteen years; Iver, fourteen years; Jakob, twelve years; Haaken, ten years; Anne (called *vesle Anne*, to distinguish her from her older sister by the same

name), eight years; Marit, six years; Ole, four years; and Knut (the subject of this sketch), in his second year. Even, or as he was commonly called, Eyvinn, the youngest in the family, was born in Fillmore county, Minnesota, in the month of November, 1867. The Jakobsen family was too poor to defray any more of the expense of the trip than the necessary food and clothing, which indeed was no small item, considering the number of persons and the time involved in making the trip, and had secured passage money from the two brothers of Marit, above referred to, they having emigrated to America a few years earlier. The legal tender of the United States was in 1867 much inflated as a result of the recent Civil War, and the debt of the Jakobsens for their passage was based, not on the gold coin which they actually received in Europe, but on the inflated "greenbacks" for which the gold was exchanged; and this staggering sum, with the interest, kept the father and boys sweating for many years; for work was not plentiful and wages were small then in America.

The trip was made in an old, leaky sail ship. The weather encountered was very stormy, and many a time the captain and the passengers despaired of ever seeing land again. The Jakobsen boys were lithe and strong and were fearless climbers, and kept the poor mother, like Hedwig in Schiller's "Wilhelm Tell," in constant anxiety for their lives as they would climb to the top of masts and riggings. Even Knut, who was less than two years old, caught the spirit of the upward tendency among the brothers, and one time the mother caught him by the skirt of his dress as he was about to topple into the sea. This trip occupied more than three months, beginning in the month of March and ending in the latter part of June, the family arriving in Fillmore county on *Sanct Hans Dag*, being the 24th—the average time required at that period to make such a trip being about one-half of that time. But incessant storms drove the little ship out of its course and kept it floundering about in the cold, northern waters. The mother's great forethought in providing ample provisions for ten healthy bodies can not be too greatly commended. She surely acted the part of the Five Wise Virgins who kept their lamps provided with oil. Long before the ocean trip was completed the food supply of many families had given out, and the Jakobsen food chests among those of others equally foresighted, were heavily drawn on to tide over those among the passengers who were at the time less fortunate. But when the family landed in Quebec they were confronted with conditions even worse, in many ways, than those which had been encountered upon the sea. The passenger families were then scattered, being moved

according to the orders by immigration officials. The Jakobsens were stowed in dingy waiting rooms and held for some days under revolting conditions awaiting inspection and transportation facilities by rail. Most of their food supply had now given out, and the problem of stilling the hunger of ten mouths became indeed a serious one. They were finally placed in cattle cars, and the mother often described that awful ride overland, her condition being delicate, to which was added hunger and despair, as being one of the most trying incidents in her life. Verily, she did not come into the land of opportunity lying on a bed of roses, or riding in a cosy Pullman berth.

Ole and Marit Jakobsen were from childhood inured to toil, privations, hardships and sorrows. The life that they knew was symbolized by the high and scraggy mountains, the deep, cavernous valleys and the solemn, blinking waters of the *fjords* among which they had lived. Often, the only light that they saw was the sunshine on the snow-clad mountain tops, which to them always beckoned heavenward. Although they saw the light above, their life was anchored in the shadows below, and the light above was all to be reserved for the life to come. The earthly habitat was invariably referred to by them as a *jammerdahl*, or valley of sorrow. Thus were the teachings of the *pietist* form of religion which they embraced early in their lives, and it followed that life for them took on a dark and sombre aspect. Duty coupled with a fearsome obedience to authority constituted the average tenor of their early lives; their childhood knew more of duty and of corporal punishment for the alleged neglect of it than it did of books and childish song and play. This condition in life, especially among the poorer classes, was no doubt to a large extent fostered and sanctioned by the state church, and the religious training of the children and youth was then, more than now, calculated to instill into the mind a sense of obedience of duty and fear rather than of love. They carried with them to this country this conception of life, and personified the literal interpretation of the proverb, *Hvo som sparer sit ris hader sin sön; men hvo som elsker ham, tugter ham tidlig*. Strict discipline in the home was considered as much a religious duty as prayers and psalm-singing. Suffice this to illustrate the point: When *Veste Anne* was about fourteen years old she had worked out for a time and had a few pennies which her parents had not required of her. She was doing the housework in the dugout while her mother was busy in the field. Anne inadvertently broke a saucer. She was so fearful that this fact should become

known, that she took her little purse and ran to Riceford, more than five miles away, and bought another like it for five cents, spending so little time on the trip that she had the evening meal ready in time. Similar instances of childish camouflage often occurred. Both were devout Christians, and their form of Christianity was full of gloom and self-abnegation, exhortation, devotional exercises and lengthy prayers. The children's Sunday was usually one of complete arrest, they being held in the house to religious contemplation until after sundown. This discipline was relaxed only after the child had passed his confirmation in the church, a consummation which was looked forward to with keen anticipation as the chief star of hope. How different things are today, when duty is so often considered secondary to pleasure. The automobiles have now broken down all walls of constraint, and the pendulum swings to the other side. Who will deny that much good has come to us through the teachings by example and precept of self-denial and devotion to a trust, such as was taught us by our parents. They erred and made us suffer, often unnecessarily, it seemed to us; but at least, they suffered with us. In spite of their more or less spartan treatment of their children, they loved them no less; but they were bound by a rule of conduct which to them amounted to the highest dictates of conscience, and which they must obey, albeit with sorrow in their hearts. And is it not true, that suffering and self-sacrifice, in one form or another, is the crucible in which character has been molded in the past?

The writer spent his childhood and youth up to the fifteenth year in the township of Blackhammer, in Houston county, Minnesota, where, some time after the arrival of the family there, the father acquired forty acres of stony land, describing the form of a flattened "U" up the sides of the east and west bluffs extending along the Riceford creek. On the east side of the creek was a narrow strip of meadow and a triangle of upland which was cleared and cultivated. Near the center of the forty was an ever-active spring, which at all times of the year furnished the family and live stock with pure water. Near this spring Ole Jakobsen erected a two-story stone and frame building when the writer was about ten years old, and the family entered into the occupancy of this new house after the adjoining "speculate" land, upon which they had heretofore resided, had been sold. It was the most substantial residence which the Jakobsens ever owned, and the building of it involved many years' labor in the gathering of stone and material. The mother, especially, became much attached to it. But the chintz bugs came and devoured the corn and small grain, and the father was unable to meet

his payments upon the small mortgage. He therefore abandoned the place without compensation for past payments or improvements which had cost many times the original purchase price of the land. But nothing was then considered of so little value as human toil. There were few neighbors and no schools, the country to all sides being considered almost worthless for farming. There were of books in the Jakobsen home, the Bible, Lutheran hymnals, biblical exegeses, a large book of long sermons, one for each day in the year, called *huspostil* (which Mr. Jakobsen read each morning with relentless regularity, an operation requiring about one hour); and the children's catechism and Erik Pontoppidan's "Epitome." No newspaper or story books were kept in the house, not even religious ones, partly on account of the cost, but more especially because, being written by men, they were apt to be frivolous, unless indeed their usage had been sanctioned by acceptable authority. The children would have wished for a Bible history, but this was considered an unwarranted desire; for did not Erik Pontoppidan in his "Epitome" declare that the Bible itself is sufficiently clear to all persons who will rightly apply themselves to its perusal?

The first residence built for the Jakobsen family in America was a dugout in the foot-hill of the east bluff of the Riceford creek in the western part of Blackhammer township. It was built on "speculate" land belonging to one Buell, Ole Jakobsen being too poor at that time to buy any land. This dugout consisted of one room about fourteen feet square, with a mud floor and mud walls, the latter being supported by perpendicular poplar poles to prevent caving in. The roof was of poles and straw and heavily covered with dirt. One very small window to the south furnished the light. Those who lived in this house were, besides the parents, those of the children who were too small or who were unable to find employment away from home, usually five or more. Compared with these dugouts, the ordinary pioneer log house in Norman county was a palatial residence. Had Ole Jakobsen chosen to do as did so many others in a pioneer settlement, cut timber not his own for logs, he might have provided more desirable living quarters for his family; but not even the exigencies of pioneer life could disturb his precise honesty, and he used only what he could pay for. This idea followed him to Norman county. Rather than appropriate timber on "speculate" or railroad lands, as was done by many, even for the building of churches and school houses, Ole Jakobsen purchased enough lumber to make a ten-by-twelve one-story residence, a home in which, with small additions, he lived in up to his death. Such discriminating conduct does not hasten material advancement in a new country.

Another outstanding feature in Ole Jakobsen's life was his conciliatory and respectful attitude toward all neighbors and people outside his family circle with whom any business relations might arise. Having bought the forty acres of land referred to from Per Larson, he, with the help of his sons, set to work to clear so much of it as was possible for cultivation, being in all eight acres. The old Houston-Riceford highway then followed the bottom-land along the Riceford creek, and the township authorities had signified their intentions of changing the road to the foot-hills. Ole then approached the supervisors and explained to them what was evident, that if the road was built where it was talked of, it would cut diagonally through his little field plot. He made them a tentative offer to build the road for the township if he might place it above his residence instead of below, thus keeping his field ground intact. One of the members of the board encouraged his proposition, at least to him, and thus Ole with the aid of his three large boys set to work to construct a public highway through rock and timber in a bluff-side, extending not only across his own forty, but across the two adjoining pieces of land as well, making more than a half mile of well-graded road, all with picks and shovels. And when the township finally built the road where at first intended Ole took the whole matter with calm resignation and never made any reference to any injustice having been done him. His old road is still traceable along that bluff-side, a lingering monument to a proletariat's lack of perspective in public affairs.

Resuming the narrative concerning life in the dugout, the chief source of livelihood in those first years was by herding sheep in the bluffs during summer months at fifty cents per head, which sum included the insurance of the return of all sheep to the owner. The children were detailed upon this work, and many gruelling experiences were had, especially by *vesle Anne* and Marit, who did most of the herding, always bare-footed, with rattlesnakes frequently encountered and sheep straying in a storm. Such of the children who were too small to work outside wore in the winter cloth- or wooden-soled socks in place of shoes, and the subject of this sketch had no better footwear until he was about seven years old; then his father made for him a pair of calf-skin moccasins with the hairs to the outside. And he was so overjoyed with the sense of distinctive ownership, that he insisted on taking them to bed with him at night.

One winter day, when Knut was about five years and Even three years old, their parents went away to a religious meeting to be gone all day. *Vesle Anne* and Marit were left in charge of the home, after the two boys had

been sent to bed to keep them out of mischief while the parents were gone. The girls were doing up the chores when the straw about the stovepipe caught fire. The girls seeing that the house was going to burn, ordered the boys to remain quiet until they could summon help, and ran the mile and a half to the nearest neighbor, being Hans C. Anderson. He and his big boy, Ben, came and pulled the boys out through the little window, the boys being almost dead, but not quite, which made a lot of difference. An attempt was made to save the bedding, but that had already caught fire, and the north side of the room had fallen in. What saved the boys' lives was, that there was not much else to burn than dirt, and that burns slowly. Then came a season for the boys to stand in straw-stuffed barrels and boxes in the Anderson home, until such a time as clothing could be provided for them; and the Anderson house, though larger, was no better than that of Jakobsen which had burned. The Anderson family was really worse off than the Jakobsens, and some of the Anderson children, being without adequate clothing, stood in boxes or walked about clad in gunny sacks, and some of the antics which were played by the children while they were thus accoutred still lingers in the memory. The following spring another house was fitted into the space which had been occupied by that which had burned, but the new one had a floor of boards resting upon the dirt, and was in many ways an improvement over the first.

It was while the family was living in the first house that Ole, the boy next older than Knut, died from a rattlesnake bite. Ole had lived with an uncle for some years, and had only recently come home. He had not been accustomed to rattlesnakes. In the month of May, 1870, when he was seven years old, he was bitten by a rattler which lay among the weeds where Ole was playing with his two younger brothers. When the rattler gave the alarm, Ole with the aid of his brothers gathered stones to throw at it; and when there were no more stones available Knut was detailed to the task of holding the snake's head with a large, flat stone while Ole was to pick away the stones from around the snake to make ready for a new assault. The snake, frequently disengaging its head, attempted to bite Knute, but instead bit the large stone. It is said that a rattlesnake will, when becoming much enraged, bite itself to commit *hari kari*; anyway, this snake evidently made the attempt and in doing so, bit Ole in the left middle finger. It was a natural thing for the children always to think that they had done wrong, and so in this instance it was agreed that no report of the incident should be made to the parents, and the situation was not discovered until many

hours later, when Ole's left hand, which he kept hidden in his trousers pocket, had swollen until it must be cut loose. One of the children ran to Riceford, more than five miles distant, to secure alcohol (and did not get any), and another ran to Rushford, the nearest location of a doctor. It will be remembered that neither the Jakobsens nor any near neighbor owned a horse. Medical aid came too late, and Ole died after sixty hours' pain. No more certain testimony of the love of these poor parents for their children could be required than that evidenced by their frequent recount of this sad occurrence; for poor Ole's agony was lived through again and again in after years in their vivid descriptions of all the circumstances surrounding the case. There was one circumstance alleged to have happened which may be related as a concomitant fact to that stated above. The writer has never been much impressed by matters of a psychic or esoteric nature, but he is willing to admit that there are countless things in heaven and earth of which he knows little and understands less. This story was told by Ole's aunt, Ingri, wife of Haaken Iverson Bakken, who lived near Bratsberg, Fillmore county. Their living room had one bed and in the northeast corner there was a stairway. Under this stairway was a cot on which Ole slept, there being no other children in the house. One night immediately before Ole was taken home, both her husband and Ole being asleep, Ingri saw an angel sit in the stairway almost touching the head of Ole's cot, and in a clear voice sang in the language known to her the three first stanzas of a hymn which was found in *Kingos Salmebog*, the first words of which are, "*O kjäre sjel, frygt aldrig mer.*" The words of that song were peculiarly applicable to the circumstances and sufferings preceding Ole's death. Whether this actually happened, or occurred to Ingri in a dream and the fact of its reality becoming an obsession to her, the writer will not say; only this, that she fully believed it to have happened. Anyway, the idea of it would form the basis for a beautiful painting.

The daily bread for all the children was a trying problem for the parents, and the children must away to earn their keep as soon as able. Thus, when Knut was seven years of age he was placed with a strange family named Paulson, which lived several miles distant. Peter Paulson came to get him on Good Friday in 1873. So, dressed in his new calfskin moccasins, Knut trudged alongside of Peter in the loose, soft snow for a distance of about five miles. The moccasins became water-sogged and constantly pulled off until toward evening, when they froze stiff. Knut's work at the Paulson's was to mind the baby, Marie, who was not a robust child, and to assist Mrs.

Paulson, an invalid, with the housework. Peter came home from work each Saturday night only. The Paulsons lived in an old, abandoned farm house, far from neighbors and from public travel, and Knut saw no new faces from day to day. Mrs. Paulson's sufferings often made her very irascible, and at such times it was well for Knut to keep out of striking distance. On one occasion, when he was trying to pass the time away by making faces at his own reflection against a window from the outside, Mrs. Paulson chose to believe that she had been the object of his attention. In her effort to catch him he ran away, never stopping until he had gone far into what was to him an unknown world. Night came on, but he dare not return, and so, like "Little Breeches," sought shelter in a sheep shed, where he soon was asleep and there Peter Paulson, with others forming a search party, found him the day following. This, however, did not end the matter, for Mrs. Paulson reported the alleged misconduct to headquarters, and in due time summary punishment was meted out to him without the benefit of clergy or the benefit of doubt. With these people Knut stayed about two years, in all that time scarcely ever meeting any children near his own age.

When he was eleven years Knut was hired out to a bachelor named Mike Brophy, a man who took a decided delight in being cruel to his inferiors, man and beast. He lived with a brother, Nick Brophy, about two miles from his own farm, always making the trip between the two places riding an old mare, "Kate." Each morning at 2:30 or 3 o'clock he awakened Knut, who must ride "Kate" to the farm and feed, clean, and harness the six horses, and lead them another three-quarters of a mile to the Riceford creek, there being no water for man or beast on the Mike Brophy place. Knut would return to the Nick Brophy place in time for breakfast, after which he must walk back to the farm, as Mike was then in the saddle. The noonday repast consisted of eight pieces of bread, slabs of pork and butter and one quart bottle of milk. Mike divided the bread and pork, but kept the milk, and the sufferings which Knut endured those months by reason of thirst, he will not attempt to describe. Suffice to say, that a condition thereby developed which will remain with him through life. Knut was not permitted to go home on Sundays, there being always work to do. But one day Mike took his best team and drove to Caledonia to attend a circus, and Knut ran home to register his complaint. But complaints against employers had but one effect on the father. Employers were especially conditioned persons according to Holy Writ; for did not Erik Pontoppidan's "Epitome" say with reference to the commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother, etc.," that employers

should be considered in the same category with parents, and must, on pain of eternal punishment, be loved, honored and obeyed (same as parents), so long as their commands did not conflict with the revealed will of God? And, as father could find nothing in this complaint conflicting with the Scriptures, it was his duty to send the boy back to his employer with a suitable reprimand, *et cetera*. Evenings at Mike's were no better than mornings, for Mike, after the field work was done, rode home and Knut must lead the work horses to water, chore them and walk back to Nick's. Usually he would then find a candle burning on the kitchen table, and a plate of mush and milk; for it was very late and the folks were in bed.

To contrast with the Brophy incident, Knute worked the year following for a Scotch family named Thompson at Yucatan in Houston county, where every day was a round of pleasure to him. Two boys near his own age were attending school about all the time, and brought their books home to study. Evenings were sometimes devoted to playing school and Knut was always welcome to take part. The Thompsons were frugal, but kind. The writer will never forget that Mrs. Thompson often told him when he was chopping wood in the summer that he ought to remove the shoes on such occasions, for should the axe slip and cut the shoe, it could not grow together of itself as the foot would.

Ole Jakobsen labored under an unfortunate misunderstanding of the American school, and did all he could to discourage his children's attendance upon the same. His idea of a school was one in which religion formed the basis of the instruction. According to his conception, branches of study like geography and history were not essential to a Christian life, and therefore useless and frivolous; and for this contention he believed he had the sanction of authority in the church because many devout preachers and laymen seemed to be of the same mind; but at least lacked the courage of their convictions in that they did not enforce the principle in their own homes. Ole Jakobsen did.

The school district in which they lived was a long and narrow one and lay along the Riceford creek valley in the western part of Blackhammer township, the school house being between four and five miles distant from the Jakobsen home. When the writer was twelve years old his father went away for a week to attend a religious meeting, and the young lad, his mother not denying him, borrowed books from other children and went to school part of five days. During this week a new world was opened to him—a world of books. He had here seen books containing wonderful maps, pictures and

stories of different countries and peoples of which he had known nothing before. His interest in these new things was so keen and all-absorbing that pictures of them were constantly forming in his day dreams and night dreams, and he learned to read and to understand of these things as if by magic. He pounced upon any scrap of paper which he might find in the road and made it an object of study. Father returned and delivered to the boy his ultimatum, and that closed the boy's school career for the present. But in 1879 the father emigrated with others to the Red River valley, leaving the family in Houston county, and Knut saw then before him the fruition of his dreams of the past two years. Father being gone, Knut secured a small geography and a speller, and these he carried with him always, even when he made his visits to the little church in Southfork to read with the minister for confirmation. It was his custom to slip these books behind a bush by the wayside before entering the church, and one time the minister caught him at it. Evidently the minister took it for granted that the "cache" was some sort of a dangerous instrumentality, such as pipe and tobacco or a Jesse James story. But anyway, as a punishment for his deceit the culprit must ride in the minister's buggy on his return way and be roundly lectured on the necessity of valuing religious study above all other things. During the summer of 1879 Knut earned enough money to furnish himself and his younger brother, Even, with necessary clothes and books to attend school, for he was determined that Even, who was very apt, should also go to school, and the latter was willing. So, late in the fall of 1879, they started for the little school house in their district, which was nearly five miles by the winding valley road. There was no clock in the Jakobsen home, the time being always largely a matter of conjecture. Knut must depend upon his intuition for his morning call. The chores must be finished, and there was much live stock, and these were fed and watered in darkness. The feeding part was easy enough, but it took considerable persuasion at first to convince the dumb brutes that it was fashionable to go to the creek to drink in the middle of the night. This they must do under the circumstances, however, for the milch cows and young stock were kept inside all day during the coldest weather.

When the two boys had chored and breakfasted by themselves and made up their lunch kit (which consisted of one thing, *potetlelse*) they could only guess at the time, for it was still night; but they must nevertheless start for school. To await the time-telling dawn meant to be late for school. So it developed that notwithstanding they had two miles and more farther to walk than any other pupil attending, they were often the earliest at school,

and at times arrived while it was yet dark and must wait for hours for the doors to open. At this time Knut read the Quakenboss' Fifth Reader and was a member of nearly all the most advanced classes, and there was but one in his classes as young as he, namely, Arthur West, the others being older. Even, being then eleven years, began with the primer, and was advanced through the first, second and third readers, ending up as one of the youngest in his class. Thus they attended school a little more than two months all told, and then their attendance was checked on account of an "accident" which befell Knut. He had learned the Patterson's speller by heart, and if the words were pronounced in their order, could spell them though he knew not their meaning. Thus, one evening he attended a spelling match in an outlying school district, and being invited to join in the match had the misfortune to carry off the honors with the word "phthisis," although he did not know until many years later the meaning of the word. A young man who happened to be "in his cups" and who had lost a bet on the outcome of the spelling, administered a hurt to Knut which laid him up many months.

In the spring of 1880, Knut, together with Haaken, Marit and Even, emigrated to the Northwest. The trip was made in company with ten other neighbors in covered wagons. Haaken, who was at the time an invalid, drove the oxen before the wagon. There was much live stock including sheep to drive, a task which was left principally to Knut and Even and two other boys of like age. The driven stock must be kept out of the growing fields along the way, and the sheep, especially, often acted in a treacherous manner. Knut and another boy walked every step of the way from Blackhammer to the Red River valley, the former to the township of Hendrum in Norman county, a distance of more than five hundred miles by the road traveled, and one mile of travel might sometimes mean two or more miles of driving. The father had homesteaded one hundred and sixty acres in Hegne township, but as yet had built no home. Knut found employment wherever he could, and after his arrival in the new country never made his home with his parents. Even remained with them until he had reached his majority, and up to that time all his schooling was embodied in his forty-two days' attendance in Houston county already referred to. After leaving home he immediately interested himself in his studies. He attended Willmar Seminary for a time, and at the age of about twenty-four years graduated from the Valparaiso (Indiana) University; engaged for a time in the teaching profession, and is now farming in Canada.

There were few schools in Norman county when the writer arrived there, but there was work, and in 1881, from March 1st to the last of November, Knut worked on the large Grandin farm over in Dakota. He was many years younger than anyone else employed there, most of the "hands" being well into their majority. The work consisted in getting up sometimes as early as four o'clock in the morning and prepare four kicking mules for the day's work. It meant long days and much walking and more mule-cussing. It meant hard work and poor living conditions, such as would not be tolerated now anywhere in the country. But Knut knew of nothing more promising to turn to, and "stuck it out" two full work seasons and part of a third. In the winter of 1881-82 he attended a short term of school in Hendrum township with J. C. Norby as teacher, and the following winter one month in Ada. He then bought eighty acres of land in Mary township, which fact kept him out of school in the winter of 1883. After having lost several hundred dollars on his farming enterprise, he abandoned the farm in 1884 and, with but a few dollars at his disposal, matriculated in the Willmar Seminary and attended there every year until he was graduated from the English course in 1889. While in the Willmar school he took up as branches of study outside of his regular course the languages of Norwegian and German; and also theology. To secure the necessary funds for attending school, he taught various country schools in Norman county, usually a two months' term each spring and fall, and at times when teaching would take a little job of "grubbing" or doing other farm work to increase his earnings. Attending college was not so expensive then as it is now, to some extent because the students had not then been educated in the art of spending money. One hundred and fifty or one hundred and seventy-five dollars often sufficed for a year's attendance.

In the month of July in 1889 he married Miss Sophic Sulerud, a daughter of Carl Anton Christensen Sulerud and his wife, whose maiden name was Maren Kjesrud. Mrs. Semling and her parents were born in Esberg, Smaalenes amt, near Christiania, Norway, and emigrated from Norway in 1869, when Sophia was a mere baby, settled first in Goodhue county, Minnesota, and came to the township of Strand, Norman county, in 1880, where the parents have resided ever since. Mrs. Semling's father had learned blacksmithing in Norway, a trade which he for a time combined with farming in this country. He sold his farm some years ago and the Suleruds settled down comfortably in the village of Gary, where also a daughter, Mrs. Martin F. Hanson, resides. Christen Sulerud, the only other child of the

Suleruds, resides on a farm in Strand township. Mr. and Mrs. Sulerud celebrated their fiftieth anniversary in July, 1917.

In 1890 Mr. Semling received the Farmers' Alliance nomination for school superintendent of Norman county and was defeated in a close three-cornered fight. He graduated from Caton's Business College, Minneapolis, in 1892, and was employed as instructor in Bruflat (Portland, N. D.) Academy in 1892-93 and 1894. After that he engaged in newspaper work until 1902. From the time that he entered the newspaper field his efforts have brought him better remuneration and made his existence more independent. There is extant a trade joke about a country editor being able to own but one pair of trousers and a single suspender to support them, but joking is the salt of the editor's existence. The country school teacher dare not joke about his trousers lest their insufficiencies be seriously looked into.

Mr. Semling published the *Portland (N. D.) Press*, 1893-94; the *Northwest Standard* (Grafton, N. D.), 1894-95; the *Halstad (Minn.) Reporter* from 1896 to 1902, in which latter year he sold the paper to his foreman, Edward Sullivan. In 1902 he entered the College of Law at the University of Minnesota, receiving the Bachelor of Laws degree in 1905 and the Master of Laws degree in 1906. He practiced law a short time in Halstad, and was appointed clerk of district court of Norman county in the month of May, 1906, a position which he still occupies.

Mr. Semling is a Republican. He is a member of the Masonic, Modern Woodmen and Sons of Norway orders. All the time when he ran the newspaper at Halstad, he held the office of justice of the peace, and while practicing law there was elected village recorder.

The following children of Mr. and Mrs. Semling are now living: Mabel Olive, born in Gary, Norman county, December 24, 1894, who is a senior at the State University; Ruth Evelyn, born in Gary, May 4, 1902, now a junior in the Ada high school, and Charles Kenneth, born in Minneapolis, March 18, 1905, now in the seventh grade.

Mr. Semling's father died in 1902, at the age of eighty-five years, and his mother died a few months later, in 1903, at the age of seventy-eight years. They celebrated their golden wedding four years prior to their death. They were honest and hard-working Christian people, but their visions upon life were narrowed by constant struggle for the mere necessities of life and by their associations with a gloomy form of religion. The lines of their lives were laid in hard and difficult places where fundamental needs required the

most earnest application, and for this reason the finer sensibilities in their nature were not permitted to rise to the surface. But they bequeathed to their children sound health and an honorable reputation, and a very fixed idea of right and wrong. There are children who receive much and yet much less than this. Loaded down with the struggle of life in Norway, they embraced the momentous task of emigrating to America with eight children, and this in itself was a most valuable gift to the children. Had they sought their own convenience; had they chosen to follow the lines of least resistance, they would have remained in Norway. They undoubtedly had in mind securing easier conditions for their children than had been their own lot. It required courage and self-denial to do as they did for their children. There are many who have had more to do with, and who have given less than they.

The brothers and sisters of the subject of this sketch now living are: Iver, at Hendrum, Minnesota; Haaken, at Bertha, North Dakota; Even (now called Edwin), at Tessier, Saskatchewan, Canada; Mrs. Rev. O. T. Nelson, Stanley, North Dakota; and Mrs. O. Evenstad, Dunseith, North Dakota. The eldest Anne died in Blackhammer in 1885, and Jacob died in Ada in 1906.