

# Beyond the Wire

*by David Ackley*

There were fifteen of us, more or less. In the perpetual melee of family life it was difficult to keep count. Since mother always had infants at dug, usually two at once, or was readying to pop another muffin from her capacious oven, father was hard pressed to provide pallet and shelter for all. In desperation he put up a wire pen around a lean-to and pitched us in to fend as we might. We suspected that a few among us were Neighbor Nabor's, inserted at night to conveniently dispose of his own surplus. Thistle and cracked corn were thrown to us each morning, and the occasional live chicken, consumed in a froth of flying feathers, blood and entrails. Apart from the festering sores, the meager fare and want of sleep from the younger ones nibbling at our extremities, it was by and large a happy life, our childhood, entertained with the mad game of escape and bloody revenge on parents, whoever they might be. But we few who lived the game to its conclusion could not but whisper our gratitude as we tucked them in for their final rest, so lovingly and well had they prepared us for the world beyond the wire.

