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Little Benders

"In the year 1789 . . . forty-seven determined Scots set out in a wagon train from the Carolina coast, intent upon finding highlands akin to their native Scotland. By some chance, when they were well into the southern Appalachians, they came across a deep gap, a high-walled narrow pass, and they went through to discover a tiny valley. There was no ready exit by wagon train and so they took this as a good omen. At least it was the only omen available; not one of these obstinate Scots would retrace his path. Without further ado or apparent thought to the matter, they broke soil, built cabins, erected a church and called their community Little Ben."

The Little Benders, in Joe Knox's collection of short stories of the same name (Lippincott, \$3.00), are as hardy, self-sufficient and independent as their 18th century forebears. To Jonathan and his brother Pete, growing up in their North Carolina mountain village of a few scattered houses, a church, a school and a store, the world outside is a strange and improbable place, represented by such phenomena as the Sears, Roebuck catalog, a Wellesley graduate who comes to teach, and the occasional airplane that flies over the valley. But life in Little Ben is full of drama; of occasional tragedy and much lusty comedy; of poetic beauty and of sordid ugliness. The reader will long remember Miss Emma Grisby and her preoccupation with funerals, Mr. Sod Winters who attributes his great age to apple-cured tobacco; and the other men, women and children so lovingly portrayed here. This is not great writing, but the author knows his mountain people and his Scottish-Americans and he tells of them with humorous and affectionate understanding.

—MARY CUTLER HOPKINS
Public Affairs Librarian
University of North Carolina Library
Chapel Hill