

BLUE GRASS.

Attracted by the bland softness of an afternoon in my primeval winter in Kansas, I rode southward through the dense forest that then covered the bluffs of the North Fork of Wildcat. The ground was sodden with the ooze of melting snow. The dripping trees were as motionless as granite. The last year's leaves, tenacious lingerers, loath to leave the scene of their brief bravery, adhered to the gray boughs like fragile bronze. There were no visible indications of life, but the broad, wintry landscape was flooded with that indescribable splendor that never was on sea or shore—a purple and silken softness, that half veiled, half disclosed the alien horizon, the vast curves of the remote river, the transient architecture of the clouds, and filled the responsive soul with a vague tumult of emotions, pensive and pathetic, in which regret and hope contended for the mastery. The dead and silent globe, with all its hidden kingdoms, seemed swimming like a bubble, suspended in an ethereal solution of amethyst and silver, compounded of the exhaling whiteness of the snow, the descending glory of the sky. A tropical atmosphere brooded upon an arctic scene, creating the strange spectacle of summer in winter, June in January, peculiar to Kansas, which unseen cannot be imagined, but once seen can never be forgotten. A sudden descent into the sheltered valley revealed an unexpected crescent of dazzling verdure,

BLUE GRASS.

101

glittering like a meadow in early spring, unreal as an incantation, surprising as the sea to the soldiers of Xenophon as they stood upon the shore and shouted, "*Thalatta!*" It was Blue Grass, unknown in Eden, the final triumph of Nature, reserved to compensate her favorite offspring in the new paradise of Kansas for the loss of the old upon the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates.

Next in importance to the divine profusion of water, light, and air, those three great physical facts which render existence possible, may be reckoned the universal beneficence of grass. Exaggerated by tropical heats and vapors to the gigantic cane congested with its saccharine secretion, or dwarfed by polar rigors to the fibrous hair of northern solitudes, embracing between these extremes the maize with its resolute pennons, the rice plant of Southern swamps, the wheat, rye, barley, oats, and other cereals, no less than the humbler verdure of hillside, pasture, and prairie in the temperate zone, grass is the most widely distributed of all vegetable beings, and is at once the type of our life and the emblem of our mortality. Lying in the sunshine among the buttercups and dandelions of May, scarcely higher in intelligence than the minute tenants of that mimic wilderness, our earliest recollections are of grass; and when the fitful fever is ended, and the foolish wrangle of the market and forum is closed, grass heals over the scar which our descent into the bosom of the earth has made, and the carpet of the infant becomes the blanket of the dead.

As he reflected upon the brevity of human life, grass has been the favorite symbol of the moralist, the chosen theme of the philosopher. "All flesh is grass," said the prophet; "My days are as the grass," sighed the troubled patriarch;

and the pensive Nebuchadnezzar, in his penitential mood, exceeded even these, and, as the sacred historian informs us, did eat grass like an ox.

Grass is the forgiveness of Nature—her constant benediction. Fields trampled with battle, saturated with blood, torn with the ruts of cannon, grow green again with grass, and carnage is forgotten. Streets abandoned by traffic become grass-grown like rural lanes, and are obliterated. Forests decay, harvests perish, flowers vanish, but grass is immortal. Beleaguered by the sullen hosts of winter, it withdraws into the impregnable fortress of its subterranean vitality, and emerges upon the first solicitation of spring. Sown by the winds, by wandering birds, propagated by the subtle horticulture of the elements which are its ministers and servants, it softens the rude outline of the world. Its tenacious fibres hold the earth in its place, and prevent its soluble components from washing into the wasting sea. It invades the solitude of deserts, climbs the inaccessible slopes and forbidding pinnacles of mountains, modifies climates, and determines the history, character, and destiny of nations. Unobtrusive and patient, it has immortal vigor and aggression. Banished from the thoroughfare and the field, it abides its time to return, and when vigilance is relaxed, or the dynasty has perished, it silently resumes the throne from which it has been expelled, but which it never abdicates. It bears no blazonry of bloom to charm the senses with fragrance or splendor, but its homely hue is more enchanting than the lily or the rose. It yields no fruit in earth or air, and yet should its harvest fail for a single year, famine would depopulate the world.

One grass differs from another grass in glory. One is vulgar and another patrician. There are grades in its veg-

etable nobility. Some varieties are useful. Some are beautiful. Others combine utility and ornament. The sour, reedy herbage of swamps is base-born. Timothy is a valuable servant. Redtop and clover are a degree higher in the social scale. But the king of them all, with genuine blood royal, is Blue Grass. Why it is called blue, save that it is most vividly and intensely green, is inexplicable; but had its unknown priest baptized it with all the hues of the prism, he would not have changed its hereditary title to imperial superiority over all its humbler kin.

Taine, in his incomparable history of English literature, has well said that the body of man in every country is deeply rooted in the soil of Nature. He might properly have declared that men were wholly rooted in the soil, and the character of nations, like that of forests, tubers, and grains, is entirely determined by the climate and soil in which they germinate. Dogmas grow like potatoes. Creeds and carrots, catechisms and cabbages, tenets and turnips, religion and rutabagas, governments and grasses, all depend upon the dew-point and the thermal range. Give the philosopher a handful of soil, the mean annual temperature and rainfall, and his analysis would enable him to predict with absolute certainty the characteristics of the nation.

Calvinism transplanted to the plains of the Ganges would perish of inanition. Webster is as much an indigenous product of New England as its granite and its pines. Napoleon was possible only in France; Cromwell in England; Christ, and the splendid invention of immortality, alone in Palestine. Moral causes and qualities exert influences far beyond their nativity, and ideas are transplanted and exported to meet the temporary requirements of the tastes or necessities

of man; as we see exotic palms in the conservatories of Chatsworth, russet apples at Surinam, and oranges in Atchison. But there is no growth; nothing but change of location. The phenomena of politics exhibit the operations of the same law. Contrast the enduring fabric of our federal liberties with the abortive struggles of Mexico and the Central American republics. The tropics are inconsistent with democracy. Tyranny is alien to the temperate zone.

The direct agency upon which all these conditions depend, and through which these forces operate, is food. Temperature, humidity, soil, sunlight, electricity, vital force, express themselves primarily in vegetable existence that furnishes the basis of that animal life which yields sustenance to the human race. What a man, a community, a nation can do, think, suffer, imagine, or achieve depends upon what it eats. Bran-eaters and vegetarians are not the kings of men. Rice and potatoes are the diet of slaves. The races that live on beef have ruled the world; and the better the beef the greater the deeds they have done. Medieval Europe, the Vandals and Huns and Goths, ate the wild hog, whose brutal ferocity was repeated in their truculent valor, and whose loathsome protoplasm bore the same relation to that barbarous epoch that a rosy steak from a short-horned Durham does to the civilization of the nineteenth century. A dim consciousness of the intimate connection between regimen and religion seems to have dawned upon the intellectual horizon of those savage tribes who eat the missionaries which a misguided philanthropy has sent to save their souls from perdition. A wiser charity would avail itself of the suggestions of modern science, and forward potted apostles, desiccated saints, and canned evangelists directly to the scene of their labors

among these hungering pagans. Some clerical Liebig has here an opportunity for immediate distinction.

The primary form of food is grass. Grass feeds the ox; the ox nourishes man; man dies and goes to grass again; and so the tide of life, with everlasting repetition, in continuous circles, moves endlessly on and upward, and in more senses than one, all flesh is grass. But all flesh is not blue grass. If it were, the devil's occupation would be gone.

There is a portion of Kentucky known as the "Blue Grass Region," and it is safe to say that it has been the arena of the most magnificent intellectual and physical development that has been witnessed among men or animals upon the American continent, or perhaps upon the whole face of the world. In corroboration of this belief, it is necessary only to mention Henry Clay, the orator, and the horse Lexington, both peerless, electric, immortal. The ennobling love of the horse has extended to all other races of animals. Incomparable herds of high-bred cattle graze the tranquil pastures; their elevating protoplasm supplying a finer force to human passion, brain, and will. Hog artists devote their genius to shortening the snouts and swelling the hams of their grunting brethren. The reflex of this solicitude appears in the muscular, athletic vigor of the men, and the voluptuous beauty of the women who inhabit this favored land. Palaces, temples, forests, peaceful institutions, social order, spring like exhalations from the congenial soil.

All these marvels are attributable as directly to the potential influence of blue grass as day and night to the revolution of the earth. Eradicate it, substitute for it the scrawny herbage of impoverished barrens, and in a single generation man and beast would alike degenerate into a common decay. And herein lies the fundamental error of those social and

moral economists who attempt to ameliorate the condition of the degraded orders by commencing with the Bible, the didactic essay, the impassioned appeal. These are results, not causes. Education, religion, and culture are conditions which must be developed, not formulas to be memorized. The Decalogue has no significance to a Comanche, and the attempt to civilize him by preaching is as senseless as would be the effort to change a Texas steer into a Durham by reading Alexander's Herd-book in the cattle pens at Wichita. The creature to be civilized must be elevated to a condition that renders civilization possible. To secure flavor in the grape, color in the rose, we do not go to the apothecary for his essences, or to the painter for his hues, but to the soul for its subtle chemistry. And thus the wise philanthropist will work from within outward, and employ those agencies which render necessities less exacting, appetites less urgent, the nerves more sensitive, the brain more receptive, and the senses and the muscles more ready ministers of an enlightened will. Man cannot become learned, refined, and tolerant while every energy of body and soul is consumed in the task of wresting a bare sustenance from a penurious soil; neither can woman become elegant and accomplished when every hour of every day in every year is spent over the wash-tub and the frying-pan. There must be leisure, competence, and repose, and these can only be attained where the results of labor are abundant and secure.

A more uninviting field for the utilitarian cannot be imagined than one of the benighted border counties of Missouri, where climate, products, labor, and tradition have conspired to develop a race of hard-visaged and forbidding ruffians, exhibiting a grotesque medley of all the vices of civilization

unaccompanied even by the negative virtues of barbarism. To these fallen angels villainy is an amusement, crime a recreation, murder a pastime. They pursue from purpose every object that should be shunned by instinct. To the ignorance of the Indian they add the ferocity of the wolf, the venom of the adder, the cowardice of the slave. The contemplation of their deeds would convince the optimist that any system of morals would be imperfect that did not include a hell of the largest dimensions. Their continued existence is a standing reproach to the New Testament, to the doctrines of every apostle, to the creed of every church.

But even this degradation, unspeakable as it is, arises largely from material causes, and is susceptible of relief. In the moral pharmacy there is an antidote.

The salutary panacea is Blue Grass.

This is the healing catholicon, the strengthening plaster, the verdant cataplasm, efficient alike in the *Materia Medica* of Nature and of morals.

Seed the country down to blue grass and the reformation would begin. Such a change must be gradual. One generation would not witness it, but three would see it accomplished. The first symptom would be an undefined uneasiness along the creeks, in the rotten eruption of cottonwood hovels near the grist-mill and the blacksmith's shop at the fork of the roads, followed by a "toting" of plunder into the "bow dark" wagon and an exodus for "out West." A sore-backed mule geared to a spavined sorrel, or a dwarfish yoke of stunted steers, drag the creaking wain along the muddy roads, accelerated by the long-drawn "Whoo-hoop-a-Haw-aw-aw!" of "Dad" in butternut-colored homespun, as he walks beside, cracking a black-snake with a detonation like a Der-

ringer. "Man" and half a score of rat faced children peer from the chaos within. A rough coop of chickens, a split-bottom "cheer," and a rusty joint of pipe depend from the rear, as the dismal procession moves westward, and is lost in the confused obscurity of the extreme frontier. Some, too poor or too timid to emigrate, would remain behind, contenting themselves with a sullen revolt against the census, the alphabet, the multiplication table, and the penitentiary. Dwelling upon the memory of past felonies, which the hangman prevents them from repeating, they clasp hands across the bloody chasm. But the aspect of Nature and society would gradually change—fields widen, forests increase; fences are straightened, dwellings painted, schools established. It is no longer disreputable to know how to read in words of one syllable, and to spell one's name. The knowledge of the use of soap imperceptibly extends. The hair, which was wont to hang upon the shoulders, is shorn as high as the ears. The women no longer ride the old roan "mar," smoking a cob-pipe, with a blue cotton sun bonnet cocked over the left eye, but assume the garb of the milliner, and come to the store with their eggs and butter in a Jackson wagon. Pistols are laid aside. Oaths and quarrels are less frequent. Drunkenness is not so general, and the indiscriminate use of illicit whisky partially yields to the peaceful lager and the cheering wine, although in his festive hours the true son of the soil cannot forbear to occasionally kill a teacher, burn a school-house, or flay a negro, by way of facetious recreation. The second generation would probably discard butternut and buttermilk, and adopt the diet and habit of the lower classes in New England. The third might not be

distinguishable, without close inspection, from the average American gentleman.

Kansas has no such moral obstacles to surmount, no such degradation to overcome. Her career commenced upon a high grade, and her course has been constantly upward; but it cannot be indefinitely continued on prairie grass. This will nourish mustangs, antelope, Texas cattle, but not thoroughbreds. It is the product of an uncultured soil, alternately burned with drought, drenched with sudden showers, and frozen with the rigors of savage winters. Already it is deteriorating under influences that should be favorable to its improvement. Armies of rank weeds have invaded its domain in the neighborhood of our chief cities, and are encroaching upon its solitudes. If we would have prosperity commensurate with our opportunities, we must look to Blue Grass. It will raise the temperature, increase the rainfall, improve the climate, develop a higher fauna and flora, and consequently a loftier attendant civilization.

Every portion of our country possesses its own characteristics, as specific as those of different nations. The thrift and industry of New England, the haughty indolence of the South, the volcanic energy of the West, the wild life of the mining regions of the Rocky Mountains and California—these are not only ideas that are recognized, but they have their types and representatives in literature and art. Boston and New York are not more unlike than Chicago and St. Louis, and Denver and San Francisco resemble Paris as much as any of their American sister cities. They are all illustrations of the law that human character and conduct depend upon physical and material conditions.

The typical Kansan has not yet appeared. Our population is composed of more alien and conflicting elements than were ever assembled under one political organization, each mature, each stimulated to abnormal activity. It is not yet fused and welded into a homogeneous mass, and we must therefore consult the oracles of analogy to ascertain in what garb our coming man will arrive. His lineaments and outline will be controlled by the abode we fashion and the food we prepare for him when he comes.

Though our State is embryonic and fetal at present, it is not difficult to perceive certain distinctive features indigenous to our limits. The social order is anomalous. Our politics have been exceptional, violent, personal, convulsive. The appetite of the community demands the stimulus of revolution. It is not content with average results in morals. It hungers for excitement. Its favorite apostles and prophets have been the howling dervishes of statesmanship and religion. Every new theory seeks Kansas as its tentative point, sure of partisans and disciples. Our life is intense in every expression. We pass instantaneously from tremendous energy to the most inert and sluggish torpor. There is no golden mean. We act first and think afterwards. These idiosyncrasies are rapidly becoming typical, and unless modified by the general introduction of Blue Grass, may be rendered permanent. Nature is inconstant and moulds us to her varying moods.

Kansas is all antithesis. It is the land of extremes. It is the hottest, coldest, driest, wettest, thickest, thinnest country of the world. The stranger who crossed our borders for the first time at Wyandotte and traveled by rail to White Cloud would with consternation contrast that uninterrupted

Sierra of rugose and oak-clad crags with the placid prairies of his imagination. Let him ride along the spine of any of those lateral "divides" or water-sheds whose

"Level leagues forsaken lie,
 A grassy waste, extending to the sky,"

and he would be oppressed by the same melancholy monotony which broods over those who pursue the receding horizon over the fluctuating plains of the sea. And let his disquisition be whither it would, if he listened to the voice of experience, he would not start upon his pilgrimage at any season of the year without an overcoat, a fan, a lightning-rod, and an umbrella.

The new-comer, alarmed by the traditions of "the drought of '60," when, in the language of one of the varnished rhetoricians of that epoch, "acorns were used for food, and the bark of trees for clothing," views with terror the long succession of dazzling early summer days; days without clouds and nights without dew; days when the effulgent sun floods the dome with fierce and blinding radiance; days of glittering leaves and burnished blades of serried ranks of corn; days when the transparent air, purged of all earthly exhalation and alloy, seems like a pure powerful lens, revealing a remoter horizon and a profounder sky.

But his apprehensions are relieved by the unheralded appearance of a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, in the northwest. A huge bulk of purple and ebony vapor, preceded by a surging wave of pallid smoke, blots out the sky. Birds and insects disappear, and cattle abruptly stand agazed. An appalling silence, an ominous darkness, fill the atmosphere. A continuous roll of muffled thunder, increasing in vol-

ume, shakes the solid earth. The air suddenly grows chill and smells like an unused cellar. A fume of yellow dust conceals the base of the meteor. The jagged scimitar of the lightning, drawn from its cloudy scabbard, is brandished for a terrible instant in the abyss, and thrust into the affrighted city, with a crash as if the rafters of the world had fallen. The wind, hitherto concealed, leaps from its ambush and lashes the earth with scourges of rain. The broken cisterns of the clouds can hold no water, and rivers run in the atmosphere. Dry ravines become turbid torrents, bearing cargoes of drift and rubbish on their swift descent. Confusion and chaos hold undisputed sway. In a moment the turmoil ceases. A gray veil of rain stands like a wall of granite in the eastern sky. The trailing banners of the storm hang from the trail bastions. The routed squadrons of mist, gray on violet, terrified fugitives, precipitately fly beneath the triumphal arch of a rainbow whose airy and insubstantial glory dies with the dying sun.

For days the phenomenon is repeated. Water oozes from the air. The strands of rain are woven with the inconstant sunbeam. Reeds and sedges grow in the fields, and all nature tends to fins, web-feet, and amphibiousness.

Oppressed by the sedate monotony of the horizon, and tortured by the alternating hopes and fears which such a climate excites, the prairie-dweller becomes sombre and grave in his conversation and demeanor. Upon that illimitable expanse, and beneath that silent and cloudless sky, mirth and levity are impossible. Meditation becomes habitual. Fortitude and persistence succumb under the careless husbandry induced by the generous soil. The forests, ledges, and elevations which serve to identify other localities and

make them conspicuous are wanting here. Nature furnishes farms ready-made, like clothing in a slop-shop, and, as we relinquish without pain what we acquire without toil, the denizen has no local attachments, and daunted by slight obstacles, or discontented by trivial discomforts, becomes migratory and follows the coyote and the bison. The pure stimulus of the air brings his nerves into unnatural sensitiveness and activity. His few diseases are brief and fatal. Rapid evaporation absorbs the juices of his body, and he grows cachectic. Hospitality is formal. Life assumes its most serious aspect. In religion he is austere; in debauchery, violent and excessive, but irregular.

The thoughtful observer cannot fail to conclude that Kansas is to be the theatre of some extraordinary development in the future. Our history, soil, climate, and population have all been exceptional, and they all point to an anomalous destiny. Our position is focal. Energy accumulates here. Our material advancement indicates a concentration of force, such as no State in its infancy has ever witnessed. Every citizen is impressed with the belief that he has a special mission to perform. Every immigrant immediately catches the contagion and sleeps no more. He rushes to the frontier, stakes out a town without an inhabitant, builds a hotel without a guest, starts a newspaper without a subscriber, organizes railroad companies for direct connections with New York, San Francisco, Hudson's Bay, and the Gulf of Mexico. When two or three are gathered together, they vote a million dollars of 10 per cent bonds, payable in London, and before the prairie-dogs have had time to secure a new location, the bonds are sold, locomotives are heard screaming in the distance, a strange population assembles from the four quarters of the globe, and an impas-

sioned orator rises in the next State convention and demands the nomination of the Honorable Ajax Agamemnon of Marathon, to represent that ancient constituency in the halls of the national Congress. In a year, or a month it may be, the excitement subsides, corner lots can be bought for less than the price of quarter-sections, jimson-weeds start up in the streets, second-hand clothing men purchase the improvements for a tenth of their cost, and the volcano breaks out in some other part of the State.

The names of dead Kansas newspapers outnumber the living; her acts of incorporation for forgotten cities, towns, railroads, ferries, colleges, cemeteries, banks, fill ponderous volumes; the money that has been squandered in these chimerical schemes would build the Capitol of polished marble and cover its dome with beaten gold.

But, notwithstanding this random and spasmodic activity, our solid progress has been without parallel. No community in the world can show a corresponding advancement in the same time and under similar circumstances. Guided by reflection, directed by prudence, controlled by calm reason, upon what higher eminence these intense forces might have placed us can hardly be conjectured. But such a career, however fortunate it might have been, our physical surroundings have rendered impossible. The sudden release of the accumulated energy so long imprisoned in the useless soil, the prodigious store of electricity in the atmosphere, and the resentment which Nature always exhibits at the invasion of her solitudes, all contributed to induce a social disorder as intense as their own. But an improvement in our physical conditions is already perceptible. The introduction of the metals in domestic and agricultural implements, jewelry, rail-

roads, and telegraphs has, to a great extent, restored the equilibrium, and, by constantly conducting electricity to the earth, prevents local congestion and a recurrence of the tempests and tornadoes of the early days. The rains which were wont to run from the trampled pavement of the sod suddenly into the streams, are now absorbed into the cultivated soil, and gradually restored to the air by solar evaporation, making the alternation of the seasons less violent, and continued droughts less probable. Under these benign influences, prairie grass is disappearing. The various breeds of cattle, hogs, and horses are improving. The culture of orchards and vineyards yields more certain returns. A richer, healthier, and more varied diet is replacing the side-meat and corn-pone of antiquity. Blue grass is marching into the bowels of the land without impediment. Its perennial verdure already clothes the bluffs and uplands along the streams, its spongy sward retaining the moisture of the earth, preventing the annual scarifications by fire, promoting the growth of forests, and elevating the nature of man.

Supplementing this material improvement is an evident advance in manners and morals. The little log school-house is replaced by magnificent structures furnished with every educational appliance. Churches multiply. The commercial element has disappeared from politics. The intellectual standard of the press has advanced, and with the general diffusion of blue grass, we may reasonably anticipate a career of unexampled and enduring prosperity.

The drama has opened with a stately procession of historic events. No ancient issues confuse the theme. No buried nations sleep in the untainted soil, vexing the present with their phantoms, retarding progress with the burden

of their outworn creeds, depressing enthusiasm by the silent reproof of their mighty achievements. Heirs of the greatest results of time, we are emancipated from all allegiance to the past. Unencumbered by precedents, we stand in the vestibule of a future which is destined to disclose upon this arena time's noblest offspring—the perfected flower of American manhood.