

BEAUTIFUL PRAIRIES OF EARLY IOWA

Vivid Description of the Procession
of the Seasons on the Great
That Are No More.

OLD TIMERS REMEMBER THEM

Many at Old Settler's Picnic Thursday
Who Remember Iowa As a
Sea of Prairie.

Williamsburg Journal: To the person who was fortunate enough to have lived in Iowa when it's almost boundless prairies stretched out like an ocean with every billow fixed and motionless, there must frequently come the thought of the inspiring sight and through the glass of memory he will see again what Bryant referred to when he wrote:

"These are the gardens of the Desert,
these
The unshorn fields, boundless and
beautiful,
For which the speech of England has
no name—
The Prairies."

And the heart will grow warm and the pulse will beat faster as mirrored from the past roll out against the lordly sweeps of primal sward, laughing back the glances of the sun, catching the drifting patter of the shower or white, all white with winter's drifting snow.

There was never vouchsafed to mortal man, a vision so entrancingly fair as that afforded by an Iowa prairie. It was as if God himself called you to his side and permitted you to stand over virgin sod upon which the first rain drop fell across, which the first wind sighed its vesper song and above which the stars sang together in honor of creation's dawn. It is spring, the treeless wastes, the long sweep of ridge and rounded slope; the south wind has blown for days and weeks across the land and many a drifting rain has marched with its million feet across the open world. First comes the grass, a type so rare that no man could ever transplant it to a foreign soil; by the dim May time a green carpet covered the land and when June came a million flowers waved their plumage above the grass. Who, that has once viewed, ever forgot the grandeur of the scene when Flora placed her vernal offering on the bosom of an Iowa prairie. Hill and dale and graceful swell in lengthening ridge a riot of color! Sweet Williams, red and pink and white—a dozen shades of each, lifting their tufted floral crests above the soft and tender grass; intermingled with these the lady slipper's golden pouch glistened in the sun of noon or held in the morning the liquid diamonds strewn broadcast by the fingers of night. A thousand acres of such bloom was a thousand acres of Eden. It was as if heaven, in an hour of ecstasy, kissed the earth and a million flowers stood forth to attest the favor.

Nor were these wild wastes void of music. The old prairies, sun kissed and flower bedecked, were vibrant with song: Prairie chickens "drummed" in choruses of millions; quails whistled a response to the meadow-lark's sweet and silver notes; the dove's plaint mingled with the robin's praise, while the trill, twitter and chirp of countless prima donnas floated across the land like a wave of sweetest harmony antheing the morn.

When the summer came it brought a new charm to the prairie: Cattle grazed on a thousand hills; the grass shifted from its pale green to a brownish tint; a stillness hung dreamily upon the scene; the giant rosin weed turned its golden disk to the sun and the stately blue-stem nodded and dipped its plume in every passing breeze; the hawk, poised on steady pinion, moved slowly up and down the long reaches of aerial sea; butterflies on gorgeous wing wheeled and fluttered in the pulsing air; great dragon flies spread their emblazoned wings over the late blooming flower, and evening's hush was broken only by the insect's hush was broken only by the epic ever written was the passing of summer's pagentry on an Iowa prairie; its lines were transcribed by the Almighty's hand on a field of the cloth of gold and as the flame of its sublime beauty paled in the light of a receding sun a new glory was revealed.

"While Autumn, nodding o'er the yellow grain,
Comes jovial on."

Autumn on an Iowa prairie! Go paint a sound or give to love's own dream a form of speech that the ear may understand, but do not hope to be able to describe the beauties when autumn rests like a benediction on the prairies now no more. A stillness, settled on the picture and the west wind's musky wind set a long low whisper through the withered grass as if it held converse with the beauties that bloomed on the brow of summer—and withered ere its noon. The rosin weed, the blue-stem and the black-eyed Susan caught scarfs of cobweb lawn as they lazily drifted on autumn's dreamy tide. A halcyon haze hovered the prairies wide and lo! the

spell of Indian summer settles on all the land; but

"No more the battle or the chase
The phantom tribes pursue,
But each in its accustomed place
The Autumn hails anew;
And still from solemn councils set
On every hill and plane,
The smoke of many a calumet
Ascends to heaven again."

We would say a word about the old prairie in winter, and another about the old trails that threaded the trackless waste were it not that our readers might do us bodily harm. But no son of the prairie will find fault with us for briefly referring to what was in many respects, the grandest thing ever witnessed on the American continent—a prairie fire.

For weeks and weeks the dead grass was bleaching in the Autumn sun; it was now as dry as pea sticks and on that day when the wind favored a hardy settler on the frontier he went out to "back fire" around his prairie home. In a particularly heavy growth across a swale the fire laughed at whips, and with one wild exultant leap it was off on its mission of destruction. The crescent-shaped rim of fire lengthened with every blast of the increasing wind and in an incredibly short space of time the fiery bow covered miles from point to point and the red sickle was sweeping the sward like an avenging angel. Long tongues of lurid flames writhed and twisted in the pulsing air and fiery sheets met in angles and roared like a battery of artillery in action; the rapidly expanding air induces a gale and long flaming blades of grass and stems of weeds are sucked into the inverted funnel and their blackened cinders float high above the seething, seething tide. On it rolls and roars, an avalanche of flame; "fire guards" are leaped at a bound; hay and grain, gathered by the hardy pioneers, are licked up by the insatiate thirst of flaming tongues and the worm fences melt in the mouth of the monster as if they were streaks of snow. Families in its path stand with blanched faces. For an hour before its coming a "back-fire" was widening the "guard" around the lowly cabin and the treasured grain; the long, low roar is heard in the distance; through the rifts in the black veil of smoke can be seen the flaming flag of the invader; loud and louder roars the down pouring tide; the sun is in total eclipse and the stifling smoke envelopes that prairie home; breathless the husband stands and the mother with blanched face endeavors to pacify or calm the terrified children; riot of red ruin impends—the bulge in the line of flame meets the "back-fire in a wild roar—a pause—the "fire guard" saves that home—and the defeated monster passes around and on nor does it stop its mad rush until the scattered fires, started by the settlers in its path "burnt out its burning" and it became a mere streak of straggling flame.

The grand old prairies of Iowa surrendered, long ago, to the pioneer's plow, but never a child of the prairies can forget the subtle charm of those great stretches of God's gardens. The names of the dearest friends will grow dim in the thickening dust of the tireless years; incidents of youth may intermittently return—and please with their charm; joy will lose its lustre and sorrow its pang when filtered through the stratas of the years and ambition's fires will pale with the coming gray hairs, but the memory of Iowa prairie must linger in the mind of all who were cradled midst their charms until the death-dimmed eye turns its gaze on the eternal shore.