

Straw cannot be sold in that region, so little is cut with the ear, and the tall stocks are burned off the first warm day in spring. Pale flowers, like a purple crocus, were crushed by the hoofs, and rich black clods curled in long waves from the mould-board's slide, while amid good-humoured banter two fiery teams came up and passed. The plough-ox is slow, if not always sure, but he learns by experience, which the horse does not; and presently it was my turn for a laugh, when the foremost plough brought up with a shock upon soil still frozen beneath the surface. A partly-broken horse is a difficult beast to handle, and it was not wise for a stranger to meddle with a frightened team. "Keep off," said Hunter, declining my assistance. "They're a little excited now, and might take a fancy to kicking the life out of you."

At the end of the next long furrow there was a temptation to halt, for silvery birches drooped their lace-like twigs over the ploughing, and I could see jack-rabbits, still wearing their white winter robes, scurrying through the shadows of the bluff, while a flight of duck came flashing down wind athwart the trunks to descend with a splash upon a lake the slow creek had formed in the hollow. Summer in that land, however, is all too short for the work that must be done in it, and swinging the plough I resolutely started another furrow. Then there followed an exasperating interlude, for the oxen thoroughly understand that it hurts them to run the share against frost-bound soil, and when the draught increased in stiffer land they came to a dead halt. Nothing would persuade them to advance a step, and when I applied the long wand the cautious veteran, President, quietly lay down.

"You'll lose your temper long before you convince an ox," said a

laughing voice. "Let them have their own way. Pull out and go round;" and in that way the matter was settled. With several such interruptions the ploughing went on, while the perspiration dripped from our faces, for on the prairie warm spring comes as suddenly as the winter goes. And while we worked, the air vibrated to the beat of tired wings as, in skeins, wedges, and crescents, ducks, geese, cranes, among other wild fowl, passed on their long journey to the untrodden marshes beside the Polar Sea. Many of them halted to rest, and every creek and *sloo* (a pond formed by melting snow) was dotted black and gray with their gladly-folded pinions. In another few days they would be empty again, we knew, and remain so until, with the first chills of winter, every bird of passage came south to follow the sun.

At noon there was a longer rest than we needed, because in that invigorating atmosphere a healthy man can out-tire his team, and we lounged in the log-built dwelling over an ample meal. It was a primitive erection of two stories caulked with moss and loam; but it had cost its owner much hard labour; sawn lumber is out of the question for the poor man, while birch logs fit for building are difficult to find. Neither was the meal luxurious; fat pork, fried potatoes, doughy flapjacks, and the universal compound of glucose and essences known as *drips*. Still, on the prairie a man cannot only live but thrive on any food. Then it was time to hunt the oxen out of a *sloo*, where they stood with their usual persistency, until their unfortunate driver waded in with a pike.

Then the work began again, and the burnished clods stretched further and further into the stubble. A British ploughman would not have approved, but Hunter cared little that the furrows were curi-