

COLONIAL PEARL.

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A WINTER SCENE ON A PRAIRIE.

Now sharp Boreas blows abroad, and brings
The dreary winter on his frozen wings;
Beneath the low hung clouds, the sheets of snow
Descend, and whiten all the fields below.

Such was the burden of my song when I awoke from a most refreshing slumber, and saw large white flakes descending, and the whole country covered with the snowy garb of winter. It is at times a very pleasant employment to watch the progress of a snow storm, but then one must be sheltered from its violence, for I assure you one cannot at all sentimentalize, when one is breasting its fury with a long and dreary journey in prospect. However, this morning I was in a peculiarly good humour, and disregarding the solicitations of my friends, who begged me to remain until the storm had abated, I determined to resume my journey. Soon the merry jingle of the sleigh-bell announced to me that my vehicle was at the door of my friend's hospitable mansion—into it I sprung with joyous gait, and away we flew over the broad and boundless prairie. My noble steed seemed to feel a new excitement, as we inhaled the fresh morning breeze, which lent life and vigour to every nerve.

A prairie is most beautiful in the spring time of the year, for then it is a garden formed and cultivated by nature's hand, where grow the clustering flowers which bloom in rich luxuriance, and "shed their fragrance on the desert air." But when stern Winter casts her mantle o'er the earth, and binds the streams in icy fetters, then a prairie is a grand spectacle and sublime, and will well repay for the hardships and privations of western travelling. I was compelled however, to ride against the wind, which whistled around and blew directly in my face. So violent was the storm that I was almost blinded by the thick flashes of snow that were dashed in my eyes. Had I acted with prudence I should have made myself comfortable at the log hut, where I had dined, for the remainder of the day; but I resolved, in spite of wind and weather, to reach Peroria by night. Whilst progressing quietly on my way, gray twilight extended her evening shades on earth. Still I drove on, anxious to arrive at my point of destination. Not a single star peeped out from the heavens to shed her light on a benighted traveller. The storm increased in violence and the cold winds whistled a wintry tune. I now found I had strayed from the road, and here I was on the broad prairie without any mark to guide, having lost the track, which had been covered with the falling snow. Unfortunately I had left my compass behind, and was without one stray light in the heavens whereby to direct my course. The weary traveller who has lost his way on a prairie, is, as it were, on a boundless sea; of-times he will travel hour after hour, and still find himself at nearly the same point from which he started. Everything in nature appeared to combine against me, and I assure you my feelings were by no means comfortable. Memory ran over the sad history of the numerous travellers who had been overtaken by night and buried in the fallen snow; many who had started in the morning full of gay hopes and buoyant anticipations, who, ere another sun had risen, had found a cold and solitary grave, arrested in their course by the chill and icy hand of death. Alas! I thought, how true—

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn—
Or busy housewife ply her evening care;
No children run to lisp their sire's return—
Or climb his knee, the envied kiss to share.

Insensibly I felt a strong inclination to sleep,—I had heard that this was a dangerous symptom, and that if I yielded to its influence my life would certainly be lost. I endeavoured to shake off the drowsy feeling. Never before had I experienced such a strong inclination to sleep. Never before did I exert myself more to keep awake. I hallooed—I shouted—I beat my breast to preserve animation, and tried every method to prevent my yielding to the drowsy influence. My noble horse was almost exhausted, and I myself began to despair of reaching a place of safety,—when suddenly a ray of light beamed upon the snow, and shed a shadow around me. Encouraged by this favourable token I urged on. My jaded steed also seemed to know that he was approaching a place of shelter, for he quickened his pace, and shortly afterwards I discovered at a distance a small log hut, from the window of which beamed a broad blaze of light. I was soon at the door and warmly welcomed by the kind owner, who shook the snow from my garments, and gave me a seat beside a bright flaming fire.

Oh! how delightful was the sense of security as I sat sheltered from the wintry blasts, and listened to the tales of the inmates,

many of whom had, like me, been overtaken by the storm, and were now relating the events of their journey. I have passed many delightful evenings in the course of a short but eventful life,—I have been at the festive board, where the wine-cup was pushed merrily around, and song, and laughter, and merriment abounded,—I have mingled in the society of the gay,—I have been—

where youth and pleasure meet
To chase the glowing hours with flying feet;

but never have I passed a more happy evening than in the small and narrow cabin of that Illinois farmer.—*Letters from a Traveller.*

A VILLAGE PARSONAGE.

It was a venerable old house with pointed gables, elaborate and pointed windows, with panes of glass of the size of the palm of the hand, low doors, narrow staircase, all sorts of unsuspected rooms, and creepers outside, trelliced and trained to every corner and angle. Then there was the modern wing with library and dining room, large windows, marble fire places, and French paper, and in going from your bedroom to breakfast, you might fancy yourself going from Queen Elizabeth's time to Queen Victoria's. A high hedge of holly divided the smoothly-shaven lawn from the churchyard, and in the midst of the moss-grown head stones stood a grey old church with four venerable towers, one of the most picturesque and beautiful specimens of the old English architecture that I have ever seen. The whole group, church, vicarage, and a small hamlet of vine covered and embowered stone cottages, lay in the lap of a gently rising sweep of hills, and all around were spread landscapes of the finished and serene character peculiar to England—rich fields framed in flowering hedges, clumps of forest trees, glimpses of distant parks, country seats and village spires, and on the horizon a line of mist-clad hills, scarce ever more distinct than the banks of low-lying clouds retiring after a thunder storm in America.

Early on Sunday morning we were awakened by the melody of the bells in the old towers, and with brief pause between the tunes, they were played upon most musically till the hour for the morning services. We have little idea in America of the perfection to which the chiming of bells is carried in England. In the towers of this small rural church are hung eight bells of different tone, and the tunes played on them by the more accomplished ringers of the neighbouring hamlet, are varied endlessly. I lay and listened to the simple airs as they died away over the valley with a pleasure I can scarcely express. The morning was serene and bright, the perfume of the clematis and jasmine flowers at the window, penetrated to the curtain of my bed, and Sunday seemed to have dawned with the audible worship and payable incense of Nature. We were told at breakfast that the chimes had been unusually merry, and were a compliment to ourselves, the villagers always expressing thus their congratulations on the arrival of guests at the vicarage. The compliment was repeated between churches, and a very long peal rang in the twilight—our near relationship to the Vicar's family authorising a very special rejoicing.

The interior of the church was very ancient looking and rough, the pews of unpainted oak, and the massive stone walls simply whitewashed. The congregation was small, perhaps fifty persons, and the men were (with two exceptions) dressed in russet carter's frocks, and most of them in leather leggings. The children sat on low benches placed in the centre of the aisle, and the boys, like their fathers, were in smock frocks of homespun, their heavy shoes shod with iron like horses' hoofs, and their little legs buttoned up in the impenetrable gaiters of coarse leather. They looked, men and boys, as if they were intended to wear but one suit in this world.

I was struck with the solemnity of the service, and the decorous attention of men, women, and children to the responses. It was a beautiful specimen of simple and pastoral worship. Each family had the name of their farm or place of residence painted on the back of the pew, with the number of seats to which they were entitled, probably in proportion to their tithes. The "living" is worth, if I remember right, not much over a hundred pounds—an insufficient sum to support so luxurious a vicarage as is appended to it, but the vicar chooses to be a man of fortune, and he unites in his character the exemplary pastor with the physician and lord of the manor. I left B— with the conviction that if peace, contentment and happiness, inhabit but one spot more than all others in a world, whose allotments are so difficult to estimate, it is the vicarage in the bosom of that rural upland.—*Willis.*

MY FISHING GROUND.

The author of "My Fishing Ground," in the Knickerbocker, has closely studied the book of nature. Witness the following, from his second article in the September number:

"Here I am, upon my old ground again. My companions, the trees and rocks, stand calm and eloquent around me. But methinks they look more sober now, than when in the full tide of spring glory. The summer deepens; the birds have put on a more matronly demeanour; their wild and extatic gushes of music are no longer heard, but a sweeter and more plaintive strain breaks forth in their stead.

"Hark! Cling-clang! cling-clang! On the hill above me, the sturdy yeoman pauses amid his labour to sharpen his scythe. There is music, and a nameless rural charm, in the beating of his weapon, which is only equalled by the tinkling of the shepherd's bell. How tranquil and soothing the sound! As he pauses, I hear but the solemn murmur of the crickets, and then the *rush* of his steel, as it sweeps through the grass, in one broad semi-circle. Is not this a life of poetry? Around him lie his 'swarths,' thick as the green waves of the sea. He is out in the great temple of nature; the heavens and the earth are an open book to him, written out by the finger of God himself; eloquent, melodious voices are around him.

"There! I have you! How he writhes upon my hook, scattering around him a few drops of water, like globules of silver, as like a malefactor, he hangs suspended between the heavens and the earth. Would you had the gift of speech, my fine fellow! You would plead as sincerely as many a wiser one has done before you, who had been as foolishly caught. You are not the only one who has felt the barbed steel, from being too greedy. The world is filled with 'fishers of men'; and their hooks are most ingeniously covered. The usurer sits all day with his long pole, and still longer line, filled with bait, and 'bobs' from morning until night. It is not for me to say how many have had their gills torn. Messieurs Quackery and Humbug are most indefatigable fishers, and the people bite now as well as they did twenty years ago. It would be a rare sight to see all the victims on one string! There would be no distinction of rank or condition. Ignorance and talent, wealth and poverty, would hang side by side. So much for moralizing upon you, my little prisoner!

"Hark to the low whistle of the quail over the hill! 'More wet, more wet!' There he sits, watching the wheat-field, which runs in waves of gold before him. He fares sumptuously every day, and appears satisfied and contented. He is a quaker in costume and demeanour, grave in his manner, and always appears in a suit of brown, rounded off in his rear. His is peculiarly the harvest song; soft and melodious; ringing in the silent noonday over hill and valley, when other birds are silent. He lingers around the husbandmen in their toil, from morning until evening. He is one of the loveliest features of the season, and the task would move heavily without his annual presence.

"The whole world is alive with squirrels. Black, and gray, and red, continually dart past me, and clatter for security. There is one now, perched on a long, projecting limb, chattering nonsense with inconceivable rapidity. He sits up with his tail curled over his back, and addresses all his conversation to me. He challenges me to reach him; boasts of his safety; calls me all kind of hard names, and flirts and rattles around, to attract my attention. He knows I cannot shoot him with my fishing-rod, and that he may take advantage of my situation to tantalize me. Oh that I understood the language of the animal creation! The squirrel talks French, as near as I can make out. His gestures and movements are all French; and Noah must have introduced this language into the ark, expressly for his convenience.

"Above me, on a blasted oak, sits a crow, peering curiously down at my pole, and setting up every moment his most dismal screech. He has been driven into the woods by some farmer's boy, who detected him plundering his corn-field. He is only waiting until the coast is clear to make a second descent. He is the most bold, saucy, and guilt-hardened of all the feathered tribe. Like Rob Roy, he takes his tax from all alike. He has a running acquaintance with men of straw, flying strips of cloth, long lines, and click-clack wind-mills; but he has such keen perception, he is such a physiognomist and phrenologist, that he can decide their character at a glance. He has a *flying* knowledge of all mankind, being a regular rover, a bird of the world. It is said that crows scent out gunpowder at once, and act accordingly. They are sextons by office, and have assisted in burying the dead, on many a battle-field. There he goes, glossy black, over the green-trees tops.