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### Sectionalism and Local Color In The Short Stories of The Plains States, 1870-1928

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DOI: 10.58809/GDPT8747

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Sectionalism and Local Color in the Short Stories of the  
Plains States

1870-1938

being

A Thesis presented to the graduate faculty of the Fort Hays Kansas  
State College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Science

by

Nelle Dooley, B. S. in Education  
Fort Hays Kansas State College

Date July 29, 1940

Approved Myrtle E. McGinnis  
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W. Albertson  
Chairman Graduate Council

### Acknowledgement

The writer wishes to acknowledge appreciation to Dr. Myrta McGinnis under whose direction this thesis was written, for her encouragement and valuable guidance; and Dr. F. B. Streeter for his helpful suggestions.

# SECTIONALISM AND LOCAL COLOR IN THE SHORT STORIES OF THE

## PLAINS STATES

1870-1938

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Robert Ramsay in his Short Stories of America has mapped out the United States in twenty-five literary groups. <sup>1</sup> He has left without sectional designation a strip through the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas and has shaded it on his literary map of local color regions as "neutral". This, "a region unexplored or explored but unsuccessfully as yet,"<sup>1a</sup> is to be known in this study as the Plains States. The strip will be broadened out to reach the boundaries of these states, thus including small portions of the sections which Professor Ramsay designates as the Corn Belt and the Wheat Belt and a considerable strip of the Cattle Country.

The Plains States will be treated in this study with reference to sectionalism and local color as shown by the short stories about this region.

By sectionalism is meant devotion to the interests peculiar to a section of the country. The short stories selected will point out an interpretation of the philosophy, feeling and attitudes,

<sup>1</sup> Ramsay, Short Stories of America, pp. 5-20 and map used as frontispiece.

<sup>1a</sup> Ibid., p6.

ambitions and desires of a people who live within the region.

By local color is meant the setting forth of the distinctive peculiarities of a definite locality or period. It can be shown in incident or in description. It can be expressed by the use of dialect. In the Plains States the strip is so broad and so wide that volumes could be written in a treatise on Texas as a whole; as Ken McClure, noted news commentator and editor, says:

From the redbone of the Big Pineys of East Texas to the hermit-like herders of the Davis Mountains, there are provincials as widely divorced as East and West. 2

This study cannot hope even to touch on the minor provincial sections of the six states but attempts rather to stress the better known characteristics of the section as shown by the cattlemen, the sheepmen, the "bad men", the politicians, the grafters, and the promoters of the period.

The period of 1870 to 1890 was taken first because it was during this time that the short story became the vogue and that writers began to use local color and sectionalism to make their stories more real and to interpret their chosen region. Before this period writers had been too idealistic and too sentimental to put reality into their stories. Even as good a writer as Hamlin Garland could not get an editor to publish his stories until after 1890. It was during this time that the states began to publish short story magazines. The first Kansas Magazine was published

2. Kenneth McClure - Letter to Writer, Dated November 9, 1938.

in 1872. Most of the stories in the early issues were not good examples of local color or sectionalism but dull, affected, rambling stories of military life in foreign countries. This first period came to an end by 1890 since it was a time when the cattle business died a natural death and when the farmers began to have better times and as a result lost their animosity toward industrialism, the railroads, and the government in general.

The years from 1890 to 1925 seem to fall together as a period; yet during that time there were changes and contrasts that were amazing. It was a time inundated by waves of Puritanism, corruption, reform, unreasoning hatred, hysterical religion, and self-denying patriotism.

Again came a period of contrasts. The years between 1925 and 1938 may well be called the period of "Prosperity and Depression." The depression brought poverty and suffering augmented by terrible dust storms and drought. Oil and gas brought untold wealth to the plains. Diversified farming, irrigation, poultry raising, and agricultural benefits all did their share in keeping the farmer from starving. Literary expression was now strong realism, against Puritanism and sentimentality. Restlessness sought its outlet not in physical activity but in vicarious amusements. The plains were a changed place since pioneer days.

Sectionalism does not, of course, stop at state boundaries or within a selected strip using boundaries as a limit. In a region which holds its place in history as the "Last Frontier"



there is likelihood of finding a similarity in sectionalism and in local color from the period of 1870 to 1938. The Plains States have that distinction in our national history, and even though stretching from Mexico on the south to Canada on the north, they exhibit a oneness of feeling and sentiment, as will be shown later. Peopled with a conglomeration from the North, South, East, and West, as well as a considerable smattering from certain countries on the European continent, it seems unbelievable that such general agreement could exist. It is the bequest of the pioneer that makes this possible. Blankenship, in his American Literature says:

Down to 1918 the pioneer spirit reigned almost supreme in the Middle West and even to-day it is far from disappearing. 3

In the Plains States the spirit is stronger since these states were the last frontier of the Middle West. While Texas may have an injection of local color by the cattlemen and the sheepmen, and North Dakota an injection by the Scandinavians, there is an ultimate end toward which opinions gravitate.

This study does not attempt to criticize as to literary value or excellence the short stories used to show sectionalism and local color. It strives to interpret the changing mind of the people by a study of the political, economic, and social history between 1870 and 1938, and its outpouring of literature in the way of the short story. The aim is to trace the cultural and spiritual growth of a

3 Blankenship, American Literature, as An Expression of the National Mind, p.14

pioneer people in their natural development in a section rapidly changing in its social and economic status.

The different sections of a country go through much the same stages in their development but emerge with some of their own unquenchable characteristics predominating. The Plains States are unique in their setting, as a last frontier, and are made up of a composite population, yet there is a naturalness of development which even the most cultured regions can respect. Philip Kates<sup>4</sup> in making reply to Roderick Peattie,<sup>5</sup> who severely criticized the culture of the Oklahomans, has before him two magazines: one for May, 1832, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, and the other for May, 1922, containing the article by Peattie. The first takes up the life in the eighteen-twenties in that part of the United States east of the Mississippi River; the latter depicts the habits of the Great Southwest in the nineteen-twenties. Mrs. Frances Trollop had returned to London and published two volumes which were reviewed in Blackwood's. Mrs. Trollop, evidently, was forced to eat in the common salle-à-manger of the floating palace on the Mississippi River, for she describes

...the voracious rapidity with which the viands were seized and devoured; the strange uncouth phrases and pronunciations and the loathsome spitting, from the contamination of which it was absolutely impossible to protect our dresses; the frightful manner of feeding with the knives till the whole blade seemed to enter into the mouth; and the still more frightful manner

4 Atlantic Monthly, vol. 130 (August, 1922), pp. 189-196

5 Atlantic Monthly, vol. 129 (May, 1922), pp. 630-641

of cleaning the teeth afterward with a pocket knife.

Blackwood's says, commenting upon the suffering of English travelers in the American Wilderness:

They cannot bring themselves to pardon the transatlantic innovation of picking teeth with a pocket knife instead of a table fork according to the ancient and recognized precedent in the hostleries of Leeds and Birmingham.

Peattie makes no mention of table manners but tells how the Oklahomans sit on the front porch collarless and in their stocking feet, while their wives have donned boudoir caps and rolled to town behind six cylinders to buy whatever hits their fancy.

Kates says:

Let us look to weightier matters--the story of a changing world.--A stranger's comment we might bear, but when one of the family misinterprets us we are always ready to fight.

So, by one of the family, may these states be interpreted in a sympathetic, understanding manner through a study of the short stories produced by their people.



## CHAPTER II

### THE CONQUEST OF THE PLAINS

1870 - 1890

The period between 1870 and 1890 has been designated by different writers as "The Conquest of the Plains"<sup>6</sup>, "The Gilded Age"<sup>7</sup> and "The Age of Chroma Civilization"<sup>8</sup>. All of these terms apply very well to the section labeled as the Plains States.

During this period a conquest was on, the gilding was apparent at times, and "chroma" is an excellent adjective to describe the shifting scenes and development of characteristics different from those of the decades before.

The Plains States were gaining settlers. The Civil War was over and men were on the conquest. They were unsettled and seeking more land and easier ways of making a living. Free land was a big drawing card to those citizens who were encouraged to go west. Stimulated by the war, there was now a demand for more wheat and more meat. The buffalo had been slaughtered by this time and the settlers of Texas had discovered that the uncared for cattle neglected during

6 Turner, The Frontier in American History, Chapter X p.269

7 Blankenship, American Literature Chapter XVI

8 Ibid., Chapter XVI.(Definition of chroma--that quality of color which embraces hue and saturation together. Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Fifth Edition).

the Civil War had run wild and multiplied. There were millions of them and they could be had for the branding.<sup>9</sup> Ranchers had the cattle but there was no sale in Texas for the meat. When it was discovered they could be fattened as they were being driven northward, feeding on the grasses of Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska, and could be sold in northern markets at the end of the trail, the cattle business became a thriving industry to the Plains States.

Industrialism in the East was creating a demand for more food as the people living in the rapidly growing cities were unable to raise their own food. Wheat was in demand, as well as meat, The farmers and the cattlemen were beginning to reign. They now had a chance to cash in on the source of wealth at their command.

After the Civil War sectionalism and local color had their beginnings. Quinn says:

But after the war which preserved the Union, it seemed as though fiction had a mission to portray all sections of the reunited country to each other and by interpreting the racial strains which made up the United States provide that understanding which would make possible the more perfect union of which the founders of the Republic had dreamed. It seems at first glance a paradox that the emphasis upon local color should tend toward a solidarity of feeling, but to those who realize that the strength of the Union depends upon the freedom of each section to govern its own local affairs, there is no paradox. <sup>10</sup>

There was more than a "mission of fiction" at the bottom of the change in literature. Before the war, according to Turner:

<sup>9</sup> McCoy, Historic Sketches, p.20

<sup>10</sup> Quinn, American Fiction, Chapter XVI



The prizes were to the keenest and the strongest; for them were the best bottom lands, the finest timber tracts, the best salt springs, the richest ore beds and not only these natural gifts but also the opportunities afforded in the midst of a farming society.-----The squatter enforced his claims to lands even against the government's title by the use of extra legal combinations and force. He appealed to lynch law with little hesitation. He was impatient of any government restriction upon his individual rights to deal with the wilderness.<sup>11</sup>

But everything was changing and with it came a series of revolutionary movements that upset the romantic evenness of the individual's life and bound him into a union with others. The changing of an individual into a mass was not done in a twinkling. Even today there is a strong tendency of the Plains people to be different.

Squatter doctrines and individualism have left deep traces upon American conception-----The Pioneer had a passionate hatred for aristocracy, monopoly and special privilege; he believed in simplicity.<sup>12</sup>

The "Gilded Age", according to Blankenship, was:

.... a time when everywhere in our social and business life was colored by gold, when money was the sole criterion by which everything was judged and when our whole nation was engaged in a mad vulgar scramble for the possession of dollars.

Americans have never been loath to accept wealth, and usually they

have been willing to work quite hard to get it; for our people have always been dominated by middle class ideas, not the least of which is the urge to get on in the world. <sup>13</sup>

11 Turner, The Frontier in American History, Chapter X, pp.270-273

12 Ibid., p.273

13 Blankenship, American Literature, Chapter XVI p.

In his chapter on "The Twilight of Romanticism" Blankenship says:

Local color as it was practiced in the Gilded Age was a pleasant and often sentimental presentation of typical life in a certain definite locality that had characteristics of manners and customs peculiar to itself. The pleasant portrayal of manners in the chosen locality is the primary aim of the local colorist.<sup>14</sup>

According to Blankenship, Hamlin Garland is no local colorist, nor is Willa Cather, but writers disagree as to what makes a local colorist.

Hamlin Garland is no local colorist; he is a realist of locale. Willa Cather writes of life in Nebraska, but she is so much concerned with character and with the effect of the environment upon human life that she is far from being a local colorist. If local color were her primary aim, she would stop with a pleasant description of a life in a Nebraska home-  
stead-----Local color has little to do with the unpleasant. Manners and turns of speech that the emigrant can not think of without a twinge of homesickness are the aims of local colorists. <sup>15</sup>

Why should local color always be pleasant? Manners, ways, descriptions, and impressions are not always pleasant even to the actors or beholders and yet may be a part of a locality or period. Local color can give an atmosphere to affect the outlook of a writer in a pleasant or unpleasant manner.

Sectionalism had been a matter of little importance in this broad strip of plains; land had been free and a farmer who had ruined his land by poor farming methods had been able to move to other land, but now there was a change. The feeling of individualism was leaving

<sup>14</sup> Blankenship, American Literature, Chapter XVIII

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Chapter XVIII

and a feeling of class colidarity was coming. The land speculators, the gifts of huge land grants and loans of enormous sums of money to the railroads made the Plains States inhabitants have a desire to get some of the easy money. Monopoly and special privilege were stalking the land. Why not get one's share? Easy money was for all, not for the few.

The last frontier, the Plains States, was being peopled. New railroads opened the way for the newcomers and gave a market for the wheat and cattle which were produced.

In America Moves West Riegel says:

The cattle business ranked with Indian fighting and mining as one of the important western pursuits in the period immediately following after the Civil War. It received more general interest and more literary recognition than might have been expected in view of the fact that its picturesque and dramatic form lasted little over twenty years. Within this brief period it placed an indelible stamp upon western life and contributed a permanent item to the characteristics which popularly have been considered as typically western.<sup>16</sup>

Henderson Fagen, Dallas, Texas, newspaperman, in an article in

The American Mercury gives this picture:

The Golden Age of Texas was the era which began soon after the close of the Civil War; and petered out toward the end of the century. The longhorn era ~~saw the~~ saw the establishment of a great feudal estates on which the cattle barons generally made and enforced their own laws. The doorsteps were a hundred miles from the front gate. The flavor of the frontier has been preserved in tales told of the cowboys, Indians, and bad men.<sup>17</sup>

Some of the short story writers who have made the romantic cowboy days live are Augustus Buell, Owen Wister, O. Henry, Caroline Lockhart,

16 Riegel, America Moves West, Chapter XXXVII

17 Fagen, "Texas comes of Age," American Mercury, vol.38(June,1936), pp. 213-220



Stewart Edward White, Theodore Roosevelt, Vincent Fortune, Emerson Hough, Zane Grey, Alfred Henry Lewis, Andy Adams, and Will James.

In 1873 Augustus Buell, an early Kansas short story writer, wrote "Flat Broke" for The Kansas Magazine. He idealized the cowboy as much as O. Henry treated him as a whimsical curiosity to be laughed at rather than appraised as a part of the development of a great section of the United States. Even thus early Buell used dialect to express local color.

"Flat Broke" is a story of Old Matt, who, with his partner, had delivered a trainload of Texas cattle at Kansas City. The partner died in Kansas City and Old Matt went on a spree and lost all the money received for his share of the cattle. He was flat broke. In his pocket he carried \$1900, which he was taking home to his partner's aged mother. "But then he was only a Texas Cattleman." 18

O Henry has a different slant on these simple, trusting, honest, and dutiful fellows.

Pattee says of his method of approach:

The task of subduing in a single century a raw continent produced a people intolerant of the leisurely and long drawn out. The enormous vogue of the short story form resulted in the journalization of it. O. Henry with his methods helped greatly to devitalize the short story and cheapen it. With him the short story became fictional vaudeville. Instead of attempts at truth, a succession of smart hits-----"The wind out of the mountains was singing like a jewsharp in a pile of old tomato cans by the railroad track,"...."a bullet-headed man Smith was with an oblique dead eye and a mustache of a cocktail

18 Buell, "Flat Broke", Kansas Magazine, (1873), p.22

mixer." He is flippant, insincere, with an eye to the last sentence which must startle the reader until he gasps.<sup>19</sup>

Quinn, however, feels that O. Henry has a sympathy that guides him in characterization:

What lifts O. Henry at times above his general level was his deep sympathy for the underdog, for youth striving for a taste of joy before the humdrum of existence settles down, for the loyalty of true love illuminated by sacrifice. Out of his sympathy came an instinctive art which respected the characters he had created, for however low they fall in fortune in the really fine stories they are never futile. <sup>20</sup>

"A Call Loan", by O. Henry, tells a story of a cattle man who, although different from Old Matt in Buell's "Flat Broke", is just as honorable and just as much a stickler for his principles.

At the beginning of the story there is a good example of O. Henry's "theatric flippant" style. Yet it depicts the Golden Age of Texas in a very few alliterative words.

In those days the cattlemen were the anointed. They were the grandees of the grass, Kings of the Kine, Lords of the Lea, barons of beef and bone. They might have ridden in golden chariots had their tastes so inclined. The cattleman was caught in a stampede of dollars. It seemed to him that he had more money than was decent. But when he had bought a watch with precious stones set in the case so large that it hurt his ribs, and a California saddle with silver nails and Angora skin suaderos, and ordered everybody up to the bar for whiskey-----What else was there for him to spend money for? <sup>21</sup>

Bill Langley, starting as a cowboy, had become a cowman and made his fortune in cattle boom days. He built a costly residence and was doomed to become a leading citizen. He organized the

19 Quinn, American Fiction, Chapter XXIV, p. 521

20 Patee, American Literature Since 1870, p. 355

21 O. Henry, Complete Works of O. Henry, p.177

First National Bank and was elected its president. When the bank examiner came he found papers for a call loan of \$10,000 without indorsement or security. Tom Merwin's word was security to Langley. Tom had sent his brother Ed to Kansas City with a train-load of cattle and would pay the money soon. The shocked bank examiner told Tom he would return by twelve the next day and the money must be there. Merwin was unable to obtain the money from his friends. That night he attempted to rob the train but was pulled down and held with the iron hand of Bill Langley. As the two drew near Merwin's home a whistle sounded, the only tune that Ed could whistle. He had returned with \$29,000 in greenbacks in an old valise.

Again in "Seats of the Haughty" O. Henry tells of two partners who had made their pile.

They had money to buy anything they wanted but they didn't know what to want. Their ideas of spend-thriftiness were limited to three----whiskey, saddles, and gold watches. If there was anything else to throw away fortunes on, they had never heard about it. So when they wanted to have a hot time they's ride into town and get a city directory and stand in front of the principal saloon and call up the population alphabetically for free drinks. Then they would order three or four new California saddles from all the storekeepers and play crack-loo on the sidewalk with twenty dollar pieces. Betting who could throw his gold watch the farther was an inspiration of George's; but even that was getting to be monotonous.<sup>22</sup>

The manners of the cowboy were developed as a product of his life and environment. Riegel in America Moves West says:

22 Ibid., p. 113



Jokes were crude and practical. Spoken language was rough and ungrammatical. "Damn" was only an adjective and many vocabularies were extremely picturesque. Many of the cowboy customs depended upon the importance of his gun. It was not only correct form but highly expedient to call out a greeting before approaching any person or group on the plains. It was customary on meeting a person to raise the right hand to the hat as an evidence that gun play was not intended. The correct etiquette upon entering a house was to take off your gun and leave your hat on.<sup>23</sup>

The following summary is of a description of the dress and equipment of a cowboy from America Moves West.

Cowboys wore woolen trousers and shirts. Leather "chaps" were worn to protect the legs in riding through brush and wooded country. The shirt sleeves were held up by sleeve holders of bright colors. Coats were seldom worn but vests were very necessary as the pockets were handy to carry cigaret papers and matches. The Stetson hat was worn large and with a leather thong around the brim to keep it straight. The hat was by no means entirely for purposes of adornment; it served as protection against the sun, rain, snow, sleet, and wind. It could be used as a pillow or to carry water in. Handkerchiefs were worn around the neck for protection against the wind and cold.

If there was anything about which the cowboy was vain, it was his gloves and boots. The gloves were of the gauntlet type with embroidered tops. They were worn for protection from the cold and rope burn. The boots were high-topped, black, high-heeled and tight.

Pistols were always black without any bright metal to catch the glint of sun. The calibre was 45 or 54. The barrel was an eight-inch and the gun weighed about two and one-fourth pounds. The gun was

worn on the right hip on a sagging belt, with the handle toward the rear. Cowboys did not always carry guns but wore them when necessary or when they wished to be fully and properly attired. 24

Woe to a writer of cowboy stories who described a shiny pistol or was not familiar with the calibre of the gun. Such fallacies were not to be tolerated. Will James, Theodore Roosevelt, and Andy Adams had lived the life themselves and made no such mistakes.

To most readers today Will James, author of cowboy stories, is a favorite for his authenticity, his manner of speech, and his stories of the old times in the cattle country. As an introduction to "Cattle Rustlers" he has this to say:

Yessir, as the cowboy speaks, by all means, is the way I intended the article to be published. Good English is fine, but it don't git there. I've records to show that I've lived the life further and deeper than very few cowboys have. I've worked at it for a living and it's all I know. I'm proud to say that I'm a cowpuncher, and not of the 1923 variety. 25

In his story of "Bob, the Rustler", he gives an example of "not those petty, cheap crooks what's read dime novels and tries to get tough, steals some poor old widow's last few 'dogies'", but of a real rustler:

Bob was just like a big average of the Western outlaw and cattle rustler; his squareness in some things made up for his crookedness in others. There was no petty work done; saddle, spurs, and chaps was safe hanging over the corral but there was one thing you had to keep away from, in the rustler's doings; if you saw at a distance a smoke going up, one man with a critter down and a horse standing rope's length away, it's always a good idea to ride way around

24 Ibid.

25 James, "Cattle Rustlers", Scribner's vol.74 (August, 1923), pp.181-9



and keep out of sight, unless you wanted your Stetson perforated. If you was interested and had company, why that's another story.

I used to know a big cattleman, who'd been fairly free with the running iron at one time and had done a heap of rustlin. Many a head he'd lost in the same way afterwards. Those he caught was dealt mighty hard with, and he'd expect the same if he'd ever made that fatal mistake, but he was lucky enough not to. 26

To give an idea of the cowman's code of ethics, Will James tells the story of a "nester" who, having run out of bacon, decided to kill a yearling, taking the hindquarters and leaving the rest for coyotes. The hide was found under the "nester's" haystack. The fellow was not at home; so the cowman rode after his wagon and team. His family was with him. The cowman decided to teach the fellow range etiquette:

A carbine stares the nester in the face, and at the same time the cowman produces a piece of the hide bearing his iron and asks him to account for it. The man on the wagon is too scared to speak or move, so is the rest back of the seat.

The cowman uncoils his rope, plays with it a while, and pretty soon a little "wild cat" loop settles neat and around that waster's neck, he's drug off his seat and close to one of them natural gallows, the rope is thrown over a limb, picked up again on the other side, and taking his "dailies" to the saddle horn, the cowman goes on till that farmer's big feet are just about a yard off the ground, a squawk is heard from the wagon and the whole family runs up to plead for the guilty party,-----When it's gone far enough and that nester gets blue round the gills, the rope slakes up and he sprawls down to earth; the cowman is right atop of him and tells him he's got his family to thank for to see the sun come up again, "and if I ever catch you leaving meat of my stock to spoil on the range again I'll get you up so far you'll never come down,

family or no family"; and he winds up with "You can kill all the beef you need, but just what you need and no more, do you hear? And I want you to produce the hides of them beeves too, every one of em."

With that he rides off, and the nester's family is still trying to figger out what kind of folks are these "cowpersons", anyway.<sup>27</sup>

In the '80's sheep were introduced and the cattlemen began a war to keep them out of their grazing land, as they claimed the sheep would drop from their hooves on the grass, after which cattle would not graze. There seemed to be a purely personal animosity between the tenders of the cattle and sheep. The cowboy looked down in disgust upon the lowly unmounted and unarmed sheepman with his dirty, smelly flocks, while the sheepman in his turn resented the flamboyant arrogance of his competitor. The situation led to bitter feuds which included the killing of both cattle and sheep and sometimes bloody battles between the rival forces.

Will James, in his story of "Old Jim Austin", tells how the sheepman came:

Then out of a clear sky came the smell of sheep; all was o.k. at first, cause the cowmen figured there was plenty of range for everybody, even sheep. But soon enough the sheep kept getting thicker and their range poorer, which started the crowding of the cowman's best bits of country. There was a few parleys without the voice of the "smoke wagon" being heard---but sheep and sheep herders don't have much respect for words or rules or country; so they went at it to start spoiling it all and the cowmen went on to finishing what the sheepmen had started, with the result that mostly sheepmen and sheep was missing. The government couldn't do much, they'd had to pinch about four States.--  
-----

27 Ibid., pp. 190-191

-----The cattlemen won for a spell and all was hunky-dory again outside of the damage sheep had done to the range. The dust beds they'd made out of the good grassy "benches" was beginning to show signs of life, the air was pure as ever, and cattle was getting fat. The cattlemen were all good folks once more and tending to their business in the land that was theirs. They were the first to blaze the trail to it; they made that land a big beef-producing country; it was their home, and naturally they wouldn't allow a stinking sheep coming along and leaving nothing but a bad odor. 28

But later the "squatters" began to move on the range and took the best springs. Sheep, however, did show up again and this time it was a "losing fight":

-----their range was being taken from them one way or another and they hadn't much heart to saving what little was left. So they tried it in another way and speculated some. In the meantime their cattle was still eating what little feed the sheep hadn't shoved into the ground, and the cowboys was still swapping a few shots with the sheep-herder and battin' him over the ear with a six-gun every chance he got. 29

So with the rise of the cattle king came a source of local color and sectionalism that in reality died out in a short time but is still kept alive in movies, story, and rodeo until there is scarcely a person who has not felt the thrill of romance and adventure at the mention of "the long drive", "longhorns", "roundup", and so on. Codes and ethics of cowboys are today misrepresented in story but still tell the history of a growth of a section under hardship and difficulty, when men met the test and stood together for the good of their calling.

Bechdolt in his Tales of Old Timers gives in story the code of morals and standards of the bad men of the West. He has talked to old-timers by the hundreds and knows them intimately. The "Warriors

28 James, "Old Jim Austin" Scribner's vol. 74(October, 1923), p.180  
 29 Ibid., p. 184



of the Panhandle", as the law-enforcing group were called, were not much better than the outlaws or "bad men,"

-----the men who had smelled powder-smoke, the pick of the Southwest. None of them but had killed his man or men; and scarcely one who had not, at some time or other, "swung a wide loop" himself. Of morals in the narrow sense of the word they had no more than the cow-thieves and the outlaws; and it would have puzzled any of them to tell what it was in his make-up that had kept him among the watch-dogs instead of among the thieves. 30

Billy the Kid is and was as much admired by the people of his section as Jesse James was in his section. Bechdolt shows the admiration of the "boys" and "the law" for this tow-headed, buck-toothed youth:

He had wandered through the Southwest dealing monte in Tucson and Old Mexico, stealing horses from the Apaches, which was accounted a legitimate means of making a living, and generally conducting himself like many another boy who fell into bad company during the seventies.

It would have been interesting to speculate as to where he might have ended and to what heights of fame he might have risen in the West had he been equipped with one of those metal badges that gave a man the backing of the law. Oftentimes such insignia have been a remarkable steadying influence on the wearers. There are ex-sheriffs in New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona today who will confess to youthful years when they were not so careful in their shooting as they might have been.

It was a period when questions were seldom asked; these strangers might have departed, leaving no knowledge of their identities behind them, had it not been that their reputations were overlarge for concealment even in that careless time. By the clean--and in this day peculiar--code of the cattlemen, a man's business is his own, and blood-money carried a taint with it. 31

30 Bechdolt, "Warriors of the Panhandle," Tales of Old Timers, p.6

31 Ibid., p, 10

"These strangers", above, referred to Billy the Kid and his partners who had stolen cattle over on the Pecos river, but as they had stolen no Canadian stock the cowboys and the "law" made friends with them.

-----their dead lay buried behind them in another valley; and they were good companions, free with their friendship, prodigal in the bestowal of confidence. The warriors of the Panhandle met them in the little hamlet and drank with them over the unpainted bar in the general store; they shot at marks; they played Monte; they danced with the Mexican girls at bailes down in the river bottom.<sup>32</sup>

Billy the Kid and his followers spent quite a while in the town. Those representing the law came under the spell of that "ingenuous affability" and some of them were loyal to him during his darkest days. Billy the Kid had a reputation.---

----From the valley of Pecos over in the West, news of Billy the Kid was borne by every traveler. It was said that the smooth-faced boy with the long hair and the two buck teeth was riding through that country like a scourge. As the month went on, as other men hunted him and the lust to kill grew stronger within him, he slew like the rattlesnake, which sometimes sounds its warring and sometimes does not, but strikes with deadly sureness.-----It was an era when cowboys were singing long ballads idealizing such heroes as Sam Bass and Jesse James-----perhaps they minimized the darkness of murders; and it is safe that they dwelt with emphasis on the audacity of his exploits. One man at war against a commonwealth appealed to them.<sup>33</sup>

Then when Billy the Kid began to steal cattle along the Canadian, that changed the situation. It was all right to kill men in the Pecos and steal cattle there, but when he stole their beef that altered matters. So the "Warriors of the Canadian" were gathering.

32 Ibid., p.12

33 Ibid., p.13

-----The fighting men from the LX, the LS, the Frying Pan and the LIT, were all there. The issue was no weight on their young minds; the question of who was right and who was wrong was not disturbing them at all. Billy the Kid and his followers had looted their employers' herds; they thought no less of them for that and most of them cherished more than a neaking liking for the outlaws. If any one of us had heard them on that November morning he would have wondered wherein they differed, where lay the moral gulf that separated them, from the men whom they were setting forth to kill. And for that matter, there are some among them who have not been able to reason out the fine points of that little problem to this day. But they were going after those cattle and the band who held them and if some one died, why, that was all in the day's work. In the meantime life was good and the fund was blazing. They made the most of it. 34

After much fighting and killing Billy the Kid was forced to surrender. Pat Garrett called out:

----"All right, When you come, come out with your hands up, all of you."

"Give us your word to take us safe to Santa Fe," a voice demanded. The promise was given. The door was opened and Billy the Kid stepped forth upon the threshold. Barney Mason's rifle flew to his shoulder. A year ago he had been one of the young outlaws's band.

"Kill him like a wolf," he shouted.

Jim East covered the traitor with his Winchester from one side and Lee Hall's weapon menaced him from the other.

"You drop that gun," East bade him, "or we'll fill your hide full of holes."

And then the outlaws came on with upraised arms. 35

Later after Billy the Kid had starved himself until he could slip his handcuffs, he shot his two jail guards, stepped out on a little balcony, and spent two hours filing off his leg-shackles;

34 Ibid., p.22

35 Ibid., p.22



-----more than a score of well-armed men were gathered in a tight pack across the street. None of them raised a hand to stop him. Two-cartridge belts swathed his body and ~~two~~ six-shooters dangled by his hips; he kept a Winchester ~~s~~tanding beside him. But these weapons, which he had got from the closet with the shotgun, were not the only menace which was working on that crowd to keep its members acquiescent. The memory of the Lincoln County war in which the desperado had been the leader of the losing faction was still fresh here where some of its hardest battles had been fought. Many of the audience were openly in sympathy with him. It would need a bold man to raise his voice against proceedings and a bolder one to lift a hostile hand. So, when he had released his limbs, one hurried to saddle up a pony. They all stood by while he mounted, and there were some who cheered him as he rode away. 36

In Bachdolt's story of "Tascosa", there are many instances of sectionalism. Tascosa was the name of a ghost-town which was then located near Amarillo. It was a period when every man made his own rules of conduct and enforced them if he was able to do so.

A killing was the end of complications then, instead of the beginning, as is now the case. 37

Young Fred Leigh, after being fined \$15 and costs for shooting on the streets and cursing the sheriff, went out and shot Mrs. Turner's ducks in front of her boarding house and was shot down and killed by the sheriff. His pals, who had been with him, realized that their luckless companion got what was coming to him and they cherished no resentment against his slayer. They owned that spirit which makes a man respect the rights of others; if the community wanted the statutes of the State of Texas, why all right----provided, of course, things did not go too far. 38

36 Ibid., p. 24

37 Ibid., "Tascosa" p. 26

38 Ibid., "Tascosa", p.29

Here is a tribute from Bachdolt's story "Law Bringers" to an outlaw who died with curses on his lips for a lanky sheriff.

"Well", Jim East (the sheriff) said, "He died nice." 39

To die fighting was to be admired in a man:

"Got him", the sheriff said quietly, "Save your cartridges, boys."

Bowdre staggered back a pace; the door flew open, he half fell within and the four men under the bank heard Billy the Kid's boyish voice.

"Charley, they've got you, get out and see if you can't get one of them before you die."

Charley Bowdre came reeling back across the threshold. The door slammed behind him. He walked straight toward the bank, swaying from side to side. The men who were lying there watched him across the rifle-sights and saw his feet dragging, his fingers fumbling aimlessly at the big revolver-butt. His face was gray, and little beads of sweat showed on his forehead. Then his knees sagged under him and he pitched forward upon his face beside Lee Hall.

"Dead", Hall whispered. Pat Garret's level voice brought them back to the day's work. 40

After 1900 cowboy outlaws became a thing of the past. The conditions that had created them were gone and it is hard to understand these bad men who were big in their very badness. The new West had come to take the place of the old West. The barbed-wire fences had enclosed the last remnants of the open range.

It was the very thing that gave birth to the cattle business that killed it--the railroad. The railroads brought to the western plains thousands of agricultural settlers who homesteaded and built

39 Ibid., "Law Bringers", p. 52

40 Ibid., "Cassidy and the Wild Bunch", p.70



fences; so it was the "squatter" who drove out the cattle baron.

North of the cattle lands were the wheat lands where the Wheat Kings reigned. There were periods when their reigns, however, looked dark and foreboding. Some years during these two decades crops were excellent and money poured in from the industrial regions of the East and from abroad. A gradual change was taking place in the people and a feeling of sectionalism was developing that formed a closer union in the Plains States, with a common feeling that the East was organizing to make money by using the Plains States resources as an investment and attempting to take away the power from this thinly populated region. This sectionalism began to affect the literature as well as the people.

Free land was exhausted. The Homestead Law of 1862 had caused a great rush for public land, and by the time of the Gilded Age the government officially announced the disappearance of the frontier and the virtual disappearance of open land. The feeling of freedom and power that naturally would come with the knowledge that land was plentiful, was leaving. The enormous grants of land given to the railroads and the power and dishonesty of land speculators gave the Plains people a feeling that perhaps man is not the captain of his fate and that cooperation with his suffering brother may be of some value after all.

About this time the "single tax" was advocated to keep down land speculation. Henry George was one of the chief advocates of such a system of taxation. His idea was that most of the object-

ionable features of our social life were caused primarily by a wrong land policy. By "land" George meant the land proper and the natural resources of the earth like minerals and timber. In short, he proposed to remove all taxation from personal property, buildings, and all types of improvements, and to levy a tax solely on the land property. Farmers who were living on the poorest lands were hard driven to make a livelihood and their standard of living tended to decrease. Furthermore, a single tax would make impossible the holding of land for speculative purposes. One of the problems of Henry George's time was that men would buy up a tract of land either in the city or the country and allow improvements made by other men on neighboring tracts to increase the value of the original purchase. This increase in value known as the "unearned increment" would simply be taxed out of existence under George's plan. Thus there would be no incentive to land speculation.

Hamlin Garland was, perhaps, the most notable writer of this period to lash out at this evil of land speculation. His interest in the single tax is seen in several of his stories.

"Under the Lion's Paw" is the best example of his hatred for a land speculator. In the latter '80's crops had failed in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. It was at this time that Hamlin Garland returned to the West from Boston to visit his parents and saw all around him examples of the unsympathetic, hard-bargaining speculator. The story tells how Jim Butler, a grocer, had come to Rock River as a hard-working honest man, but after he had sold a lot of

land for four times what he had paid for it, he became money mad.

Every cent he could save or spare from his trade he put into land at forced sale or mortgages on land, which were "just as good as wheat", he was accustomed to say.

Butler asked three thousand dollars for the land when Haskins went on it for a year, with a chance to buy it or stay on for a longer period. Haskins improved the buildings and raised an excellent crop by hard labor; his own, his wife's, and his sons'. At the end of the year Haskins went to see Butler and made an offer to pay some money and give a mortgage for the balance. Butler informed him the land was worth much more now and asked five thousand, five hundred dollars for it.

"I'm kickin' about payin' you twice f'r my own things,--  
----my own fences, my own kitchen, my own garden."

Butler laughed. "You're too green t' eat, young feller. Your improvements! The law will sing another tune."

"But I trusted your word."

"Never trust anybody, my friend. Besides, I didn't promise not to do this thing. Why, man, don't look at me like that! Don't take me for a thief! It's the law. The regular thing. Everybody does it." 41

There is a source of sectionalism in a plan whereby a man living in the East can buy and sell the lands of a section pioneered by his fellowman. The Plains States were arousing and organizing against it, especially during hard times when getting a living was a laborious task.

In A Son of the Middle Border, a book that is largely

41 Garland, Main-Travelled Roads, p. 197

autobiographical, Garland tells of his visit to Ordway, South Dakota, in the summer of 1887. He saw the ugliness, the endless drudgery and the loneliness of the farmers' lot. The houses were "bare as boxes, dropped on the treeless plains, the barbed wire fences running at right angles, and the towns, merely assemblages of flimsy wooden sheds with painted-pine battlement, produced on me the effect of an almost helpless and sterile poverty."

His mood deepened into bitterness when he saw his mother. It was lifted somewhat when his father came in from the field with a bunch of wild flowers for his mother and he saw her smile. They had not slipped into the common rut of joyless drudgery and aimless living. Then on his return visit in 1889 when his mother had a stroke of paralysis due to overwork and the dreadful heat of the summer, it was no wonder Garland saw the locality pervaded with an atmosphere of cheerlessness and futility.

W. D. Howell says that Garland filled his short stories with:

"The bitter and burning dust, the foul and trampled slush of the common avenues of life, the life of men who hopelessly and cheerlessly make the wealth that enriched an alien and the idler and impoverishes the producer---. The stories are full of those gaunt, grim, sordid, pathetic, ferocious figures, whom our satirists find so easy to caricature as Hayseeds, and whose blind groping for fairer conditions is so grotesque to the newspapers and so menacing to the politicians. They feel that something is wrong and they know that the wrong is not theirs. The life caught in Mr. Garland's book is not pretty; it is ugly and often ridiculous; but it is heartbreaking in its rude despair." 42

Some stories in which he is strong in local color and



sectionalism are "Up the Coolly", "A Branch Road", "Among the Corn-Rows", "The Return of a Private", "Mrs. Ripley's Visit!"

In "Up the Coolly" the successful playwright and actor returns to his old home in the West:

"It was humble enough--a small white story-and-a-half structure, with a wing set in the midst of a few locust-trees; a small drab-colored barn with a sagging ridge-pole; a barnyard full of mud, in which a few cows were standing, fighting the flies and waiting to be milked. An old man was pumping water at the well; the pigs were squealing from a pen near by; a child was crying.<sup>43</sup>

His brother was milking in the muddy barnyard but finished the cow before he came to greet him:

"Well, I'm glad to see you, but I can't shake hands. That damned cow had laid down in the mud."<sup>44</sup>

Howard went to find his mother:

A gray-haired woman was sitting in a rocking-chair on the porch, her hands in her lap, her eyes fixed on the faintly yellow sky, against which the hills stood, dim purple silhouettes, and on which the locust trees were etched as fine as lace. There were sorrow, resignation, and a sort of dumb despair in her attitude.<sup>45</sup>

Next day he went to the hay field to help his brother, who was sullen and sneering in his attitude toward his city brother:

"Give me that fork. You'll be spoiling your find clothes."

"Oh, these don't matter. They're made for this kind of thing."

"Oh, are they? I guess I'll dress in that kind of a rig. What did that shirt cost? I need one."

"Six dollars a pair, but then it's old."

"And them pants," he pursued; "they cost six dollars, too, didn't they?"

43 Ibid., p. 79

44 Ibid., p. 80

Howard's face darkened. He saw his brother's purpose. he resented it. "They cost fifteen dollars, if you want to know, and the shoes cost six-fifty. This ring on my cravat cost sixty dollars, and the suit I had on last night cost eighty-five. My suits are made by Breckstein, on Fifth Avenue, if you want to patronize him," he ended brutally, spurred on by the sneer in his brother's eyes, "I'll introduce you."

"Good idea," said Grant, with a forced, mocking smile. I need just such a get-up for haying and corn ploughing. Singular I never thought of it. Now my pants cost me eighty-five cents, s'penders fifteen, hat twenty, shoes one-fifty; stockin's I don't bother about." -----

"Singular we fellers here are discontented and mulish, ain't it? Singular we don't believe your letters when you write, sayin, I just about make a living of it? Singular we think the country's going to hell, we fellers, in a two-dollar suit, wading around in the mud or sweatin' around in the hayfield, while you fellers lay around New York and smoke and wear good clothes and toady to millionaires." 46

In "A Branch Road" the description of threshing time and conversation at the dinner are typical of this section:

Threshing-time was always a season of great trial to the house wife. To have a dozen men "with the appetites of dragons" to cook for, in addition to their other everyday duties, was no small task for a couple of women: Preparations usually began the night before with "a raid on the hen-roost," for a "biled chickun" formed the piece de resistance of the dinner. Extra seats were made out of planks placed on chairs, and dishes were borrowed from neighbors, who came for such aid in their turn. "They ranged along the table with a great deal of noise, boots thumping, squeaking, knives and forks rattling, voices bellowing

46 Ibid., p. 91

out."

"Now hold on, Steve! I want to be next to the kitchen door! I won't get nothin' with you on that side o' me."

"Oh, that's too thin! I see what you've-----

"No, I won't need any sugar, if you just smile into it." This from gallant David, greeted with roars of laughter.

"Now, Dave, s'pose your wife 'ud hear o' that?"

"She'd snatch 'im bald-headed, that's what she'd do."

"Say, somebody drive that ceow down this way," said Bill.

"Don't get off that drive! It's too old," criticized

Shep, passing the milk-jug. -----

"A man that'll eat seven taters-----"

"Shows who does the work."

"Yes, with his jaws," put in Jim Whellock, the driver.

"If you'd put in a little more work with soap 'n water before comin' in to dinner, it 'ud be a religious idee," said David.

"It ain't healthy to wash."

"Well, you'll live forever, then."

"He ain't washed his face sence I knew 'im."

"Oh, that's a little too tough! He washes once a week," said Ed Kinney.

"Back of his ears?" inquired David, who was munching a doughnut, his black eyes twinkling with fun.

"Yep."

"What's the cause of it?"

"Dade says she won't kiss 'em if he don't."

Everybody roared. "Good fer Dade. I wouldn't if I was in her place." 47

William Allen White can paint as desolate a picture of life on the western plains as Hamlin Garland. In "A Story of the Highlands" 48 he describes the defeat of a youthful pair. Here too the mortgage has its part in the crushing defeat. A young man, Burkholder, came to Western Kansas in 1885. He was a college graduate of good judgement. He had enough money to stock his farm but had to put a mortgage on his

47 Garland, Main-Travelled Roads, p. 16

48 White, The Real Issue, p. 78

land. Later he sent for his young wife, a cultured young lady. Their pioneer home was cozy with books, pictures, and a piano. The young wife was happy roughing it. Later it was necessary to put another mortgage on the land. In 1887 the hot winds blighted everything. Dust sifted through every crack and crevice. Mrs. Burkholder's letters began to show a little homesickness. The piano and books were sold to buy provisions. The wife worked out-of-doors with her husband now. There were whole weeks when she neglected her toilet. On a hill in sight of their land was a cemetery with a solitary cottonwood sapling. By 1889 they were living on "aid". Men were going East looking for jobs. They left their wives with "God and the county Commissioners". Burkholder dumbly went with the jobseekers. When the summer was over there was one vacant house, one more among hundreds far out on the highlands. There was one more mound in the bleak country graveyard.

Early pioneers were very anxious to get the railroad to come to their part of the country. Mrs. Frances Gilchrist Wood writes in "Turkey Red" of how it came about in the Dakotas. She shows the "spirit and courage of the pioneers" in dealing with the problems of obtaining a living and dealing with the land investors and promoters from the East.

Before the Dakotas became states the old mail sled was running between Honey and Le Beau on a cold day. The passengers were <sup>a</sup>stranger, Smith by name, Hillas, a young man living on



his pre-emption claim, and Dan, the mail carrier. Dan and Hillas were discussing the possibility of a railroad. "They say they don't want to build a railroad until the country's settled," Hillas was saying. The stranger, very much interested, inquired as to the timber, ores, or any valuable natural resources of this section.

But Hillas and Dan, not having decided upon Smith's business, did not answer his questions.

"We're too busy rustling for something to eat first. and you can't develop a mine without tools."

"Tools?" questioned Smith.

"Yes, a railroad first of all."---

"It's a God-forsaken country. Why don't you get out? Why should any sane man ever have chosen this frozen wilderness."---

"We came in the spring," explained Hillas.

"I see," the edged voice snapped. "Visionaries!"

-----

"Visionary, pioneer, American! That was the evolution in the beginning. Perhaps that is what we are. -----The first pioneers had to wait, too. How could they stand it so long!" 49

Dan testily entered the conversation to ask Smith if he was an American and if he had ever heard about the Pilgrim Fathers.

"Frontiersmen, same as us. You're living on what they did.-----The country's all right if we only had a railroad."

Smith was content. What did they have to offer a railroad?

"Where's your freight, your grain, your cattle----no company would risk a line through here."

Then Dan inquired of the stranger his business:

"There's two kinds of business out here this time of year. Tain't healthy for either of them." Dan's words were measured and clipped. "You've damned the West and all that's in it good and plenty. Now I say, damn the people anywhere in the whole country that won't pay their debts from pioneer to pioneer; that lets us fight the wilderness barehanded and die fighting; that won't risk--  
-----50

They saw through the now blinking snow storm a signal of distress from a sod shanty, and leaving the trail, with much difficulty reached the place where a lone woman battled for the life of a sick child. Dan, who seemed to understand the method of relieving croup, saved the child. Hillas had already risked his life to save Smith on the way to the shanty.

Smith, now thoughtful and awkwardly trying to make amends for his ignorance, said,

Hillas, they call me a shrewd business man. I am, it's a selfish job and I'm not reforming now. But twice tonight you---children have risked your lives without thought, for a stranger. I've been thinking about that railroad. Haven't you raised any grain or cattle that could be used as freight?"

The low answer was toneless, "Drought killed the crops, prairie fires burned the hay, and of course the cattle starved."

Smith stood up, his hands deep in his pockets. "I admitted I was shrewd, Hillas, but I'm not yellow clear through, not enough to betray this part of the frontier anyhow. I had a man along here last fall spying for minerals. That's why I am out here now. If you know the location and we both think you do, I'll put capital in your way to develop the mines and use what pull I have to get the road in. ----- This country's a desert now, but I'd back the Sahara peopled with your kind. This is on the square, Hillas,

don't tell me you won't believe I'm -----American  
enough to trust?" 51

Hillas admitted that Dan and he did know where there was an out-cropping of coal but that they did not have enough money to file mining claims. Smith offered them the money to file and promised his influence to bring the railroad to Dakota.

In "The Windfighters" Jim Dara and his wife, Nora, of Irish immigrant stock were Nebraska pioneers. Both were great music lovers. Times had been hard, crops poor, and they had lost two children; but now it was spring again.

"A good year," Dara repeated, "A fine year for crops."----"We've done well considering. We're not like them that had to take aid. Charity we have not had to take," said Dara. 52

Martin Byrne, whose wife had left him and gone back East, gave Nora his piano to use. Nora practiced with knotty hardened red hands until some of her old ability to play returned.

In June they had a fine stand of corn, but by August everything was dry, hot, and dusty.

Nora looked out upon

----the tasseled corn-field, immense, blue green, opulent--a field of vast acreage, representing so much toil, so many hopes, so brave a fight!---But what cares nature for courage, or for hopes, or for human aspiration? Wind had begun to blow. Viewless fire, enormously puffing, ran in repeated whiffs across the prairie. 53

52 Becker, Golden Takes of the Prairie States, p. 99-104

53 Ibid., p. 100



Three prairie vans came in sight down the trail, discouraged settlers leaving.

"Only look at that now! said Dara, contemptuously, "Deserting their homesteads!"

"Don't be scornful, Jim, boy. Maybe it's the winds they're going from. Maybe they can't get used to the winds grieving always, come summer, come winter, snow winds, and dust winds, ice and fire forever!" 54

Nora and Jim planned to hold these people. Music would give them back their nerve. The visitors stopped and tried to persuade Jim and Nora to go with them. Dara said it would rain soon if they would only stick it out. Nora played Dixie for them.

"That's it," Dara called out, "There is a charge and a yell and a big fight in that tune. Well you know that, Con Lewis. You were a soldier once for your Dixie Land. You didn't run from bullets I'm thinking. But will you now be running right from the land?"

"Why not pull out?" he sullenly questioned. "What's to stay for, don't you know, you Irish son-of-a-gun, when you're clean licked? You can't fight the winds," he added. "Nobody can."

"They did it in Iowa," said Dara. "They did it in Illinois. They made a corn empire of it, the richest in all the world. Cultivation of the soil brought the rains. Trees grew, climate changed. God's country, you call it."

"Was never the same as this," said Lewis, stubbornly shaking his head. "Could grow something besides sage and soapweed and buffalo grass. Me, I won't stay to see my crop burn up."

"There's something grows here better than corn."  
"In God's name, what?"

"I'll tell you what," said Dara. "There's Mrs. Arnold sitting yonder; she who came to us when darkness

was in our house and our little children dying. She stayed in with us. She gave us comfort. We had no money for us to pay her with. We had no money for the doctor, but he came too. Still he did what he could for us. Coal and groceries and clothes we needed and there was Martin Byrne in town let us have them. And he's done the like of that for the rest of you, I'm thinking. So, will you tell me, Con Lewis, is there any country, anywhere, as can produce a bigger crop of kindness.".... -

Then it began to rain in great splashes.

A damp dusty odor penetrated the house, the people drank of it, that wet good smell! They watched the storm enormously swishing. Sunflowers bobbed and throbbed. The drenching waste blurred the cottonwoods into gray phantoms that seemed trying to skip and leap and dance. Men whacked each other, laughed, hopped about, yelled like pranking boys. They flung wide the doors, they plunged out into the downpour,-----shot off their guns, chased to and fro, shouting themselves hoarse.-----55

It was a good year, that one!

William Allen White wrote of the small town and its social influence. He brings out some of the signs of the Gilded Age by showing the hypocrisy, and the false ideals in social and political life. In God's Puppets, in "The One a Pharisee" this is best shown. Boyce Kilworth had it dimmed into him:

First you must be respectable, second you must get on in the world---("on" being translated, meant property--- your own property.) 56

Boyce grew up, married, and did many shady things, but he became superintendent of the Sunday School. Caleb, his half-brother, was an out-and-out gambler and this shocked Boyce.

55 Ibid., pp 103-104

56 White, God's Puppets, p. 74

And as for Boyce's stepbrother, Caleb Hale, for all his New England lineage, for all his exact sartorial regularity, for all his Harvard degree, he gambled-----gambled at cards while the whole town was debauching itself gambling in real estate----and that was the end of him. But Boyce Kilworth got on with Eminent Respectability. 57

Caleb's child was known as the gambler's son, but when Caleb went to Cripple Creek (leaving his family in the home town) and made his fortune, the scoffers were more than ready to forget all past sin. Caleb returned, lived a quiet life, finally began to raise flowers as a hobby. There were stories that he had lost his fortune gambling. Dick Hale, Caleb's son, became a cashier in his Uncle Boyce's bank and forged signatures to notes to tide over the bank until the bank examiner had left town. But finally Boyce, the Pharisee, was caught short. Caleb, the sinner, dug up his hidden fortune from beneath the Delphinium bed and gave his brother the money. Caleb had said on his return from Cripple Creek:

"I tell you, Colonel, a place---where money--raw, stinking, wet, green, uncured money is God, comes nearer to hell than any other place on this planet." ---But your money, Caleb?" inquired the Colonel cautiously, "What are you going to do with-----." "I've already put it where it will do the most good," cut in Hale. 58

The Colonel spoke of Boyce now that ruin was upon him and he sat "slumped mentally and morally," lamenting that he had ruined thousands.

57 Ibid., p. 77

58 Ibid., p. 115



"Boyce, you can't ruin people by taking money from them----not even all their money.-----They'll adjust themselves; their life's philosophy will make them happy or unhappy, entirely independent of this money you've taken." 59

Caleb, the brother, had very little sympathy for a gambler since he had been one.

-----I can see what I was in those days, what my winnings meant to thousnads who saw me win--- neighbors, friends, young boys----a whole community--- I debauched 'em, cut into their faith in the moral government of this work, by lying and stealing and cheating and winning and winning---getting away unscathed of God and man--and that's what shrivels my soul in abasement, that's what makes me cry: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner,"-----It's not what a hypocrite does, not what he gets out of life, that makes him hated; it's what he is, and the poison to our faith that he spreads---60

When Caleb tried to tell Boyce why he was giving him the money he was incapable of understanding. The sight of the money did bring a sign of joy.

"Take it--take the miserable stuff---, and lie--- lie for the glory of God, and tell 'em it's yours; that you've always had it---Take it not for your depositors, though it's got to go that way; but take it for the sake of a miserable sinner who had God's mercy once and wants to make this small return in sustaining the faith of his fellows." -----Caleb Hale-----stood watching greed and self-respect--curious companions--- as they were being reborn on Boyce Kilworth's face. 61

White wrote many other stories of this period; among them are: "The Real Issue", "The Fraud of Men", "The Rod of His Wrath", "The Mercy of Death", "A Social Rectangle", and "A

59 Ibid., p. 182

60 Ibid., p. 184-185

61 Ibid., p 198

Prosperous Gentleman".

In "The Real Issue" is told the gradual moral decay of a politician who had been in the house seven years as a member from Kansas. The campaign was on again and newspapers were accusing and wondering. Where did Tom Wharton get his banks, railroads stock, farms, and mortgages? Tom was back in his home town. Ike Russell wanted money to help "swing them in line."

"Ike, what is the real issue in this campaign?"

"I dunno, old man, sometimes I think it is the tariff, sometimes I think it is silver and then at other times, I just give it all up. What's your idea, Tom?"

Tom became reminiscent and recalled his boyhood ambitions to become a great statesman like Calhoun or Clay.

"Ike, when I went to the legislature in the winter of '70 and came back discouraged and disappointed with the sham of it all--the row and the rings and schemes--Talk of work in the house---You know as well as I do, that it is hollow---all a hollow show. What's the use of it? -----I go back there, work and fret and stew, for this and that and the other thing that I don't care a cent for. I have no heart in it. If I go on I must buy my way in, buy my own slavery, Ike, slavery to the fellows I despise. I'm out of this fight"----62

But the following Monday morning Tom Wharton made out a check for two thousand and three hundred dollars to Isaac Russell. 62

"The Rod of his Wrath" 63 is the story of the life of John Markley. He had been a prominent citizen but in middle age had lost his social position through greed and lust. He attempted to buy it back by giving large sums of money to civic organizations,

62 White, The Real Issue, pp 102

63 White, In our Town, pp 92-102

and by inviting the best of the townspeople to elaborate parties and dimmers. The Lord showed His Righteous Judgment and did His work through the spirit of the community.

"The Fraud of Men" points out the maliciousness of gossip and its power to wound others. A group of small town men are the aggressors. Mrs. Cameron, a passer-by, is being maligned. Her home town banker overhears, shows up their narrow meanness, and ends by saying:

"It's your farce, maybe, but Great God, it's her--her--her tragedy!" 64

Willa Cather in "The Sculptor's Funeral" showed the narrow meaningless lives of a people striving for money--A group of men were waiting for the body of a boy who had gone East and had not made good according to their standards.

"Too bad he didn't belong to some lodge or other. I like an order funeral myself. They seem more appropriate for people of some reputation." 65

A young Bostonian, one of the dead sculptor's pupils had come with the body: When the body was taken into the ugly house he could not believe this could have been the home of his friend. The mother was handsome with

-----a kind of brutal handsomeness, even, but it was seared and furrowed by violence, and so colored and coarsened by fierce passions which grief seemed never to had laid a gentle finger upon.

64 White, The Real Issue, pp.87-103

65 Cather, Youth, and the Bright Medusa, pp. 248-272



-----The father was feeble and old, tall, and frail, odorous of pipe and with shaggy unkept grey hair and a dingy beard, tobacco stained about the mouth. 66

The dead son was at home again:

"It was as though the strain of life had been so sharp and bitter that death could not at once relax the tension and smooth the countenance into perfect peace-- as though he were guarding something very precious, that might even yet be wrested from him. 67

Jim Laird, the half-drunk lawyer who had been among the group to meet the train, was the only one who seemed to be having any real grief or understanding. He told Stevens of the life that the Sculptor had led among these narrow, grasping people.

"I never could see how he kept himself sweet."

"He was wonderful" said Steavens slowly, "Wonderful; but until tonight I have never known how wonderful."

"That is the eternal wonder of it, anyway; that it can come even from such a dung heap as this," the lawyer cried, with a sweeping gesture which seemed to indicate much more than the four walls within which they stood.--- Steavens understood now the real tragedy of his master's life-----the yearning of a boy cast -----[among]newness and ugliness and sordidness, for all that is chastened and old, and noble with tradition. 68

The watchers that night, bankers, elders and real estate men, coal and lumber dealer, and cattle shipper, discussed usury laws, and chattel security loans until the family were in bed; then discussed Harve the sculptor---how he should have stayed and helped his father add in stock. Steavens was amazed, for the whole world knew Harve was a famous sculptor and had put his town on the map. Jim Laird staggered in, drunker than ever, to tell this

-67 Ibid., p. 251

68 Ibid., p. 265

Boston man:

"I want this Boston man to know that the drivel he's been hearing here tonight is the only tribute any truly great man could have from such a lot of sick, side-tracked, burnt-dog, land-poor sharks as these here-present financiers of Sand City--upon which town may God have mercy." 69

Jim Laird had gone to school with Harve and had at one time had high aspirations, but had come back to his home town to become a shyster lawyer for his crooked townsmen and to defend their sons in legal battles because they had been taught nothing but money and knowing how to be successful rascals.

But the boys were young and raw at the business you put them to--you wanted them to be successful rascals; they were only unsuccessful ones--that's all the difference. There was only one boy ever raised in this borderland between ruffianism and civilization who didn't come to grief, and you hated Harve Merrick more for winning out than you hated all the other boys who got under the wheels, Lord, Lord, how you did hate him. Phelps, here is fond of saying that he could buy and sell us all out any time his a mind to; but he knew Harve wouldn't have given a tinker's damn for his bank and all his cattlebarns put together; and a lack of appreciation, that way, goes hard with Phelps. 70

This period came to a natural end; as the barbed wire ended the picturesque romantic life of the range-cowboy and the "bad man," so better crops and a feeling of cooperation and civic consciousness did much to end the farmer's hard feeling against the other sections of the country and industrialism and rail roads.

69 Ibid., p. 271

70 Ibid., p. 272

## CHAPTER III

## The Age of Corruption and Reform

1890 - 1925

Eastern critics say of Paul I. Wellman's recent novel, Jubal Troop, that "The man goes through just a little too much". Jubal Troop was a plainsman wandering from the Dakotas southward to the southern border of the United States during the period of 1886 to 1920. In a review of the history of this period in the Plains States, it becomes evident that the people did go through "just a little too much". William Allen White in a highly laudatory review of Jubal Troop says that the people of the West who have been on the scene long enough to know its history can vouch for the authenticity of Jubal Troop's character and his fabulous experiences.

A young man with a scheme good for himself visited Kansas back in 1902, according to an article in the Atlantic Monthly:

"Why is it," he asked, "That the Kansans are so critical? Our plan worked all right in the South last winter and in Ohio and Iowa."

"Well," said an old timer who overheard him, "one reason is that the folks have been struggling with schemes of one kind and another for twenty years and they've learned to be careful. You will find it harder yet in Oklahoma, for the people there have gone all through what we have and a good deal more. The West is full of experience." 71

71 Atlantic Monthly, vol XC (September, 1902), p.85



The short story is able to catch only a brief interval or mere phase of the swiftly moving panorama of this period. It takes an epic novel to go very far with any chosen character and his experiences in such a changing civilization.

As the twentieth century began there was a quest for ethical expansion. Reform had many robes in which to display itself: Holy robes of righteousness, white-hooded robes of morality, and Old Glory robes of patriotism. "America for the Americans" and "Do Away with Everything German" seemed to be the slogans of a reforming populace. Religion in most sections of the Plains States became hysterical, narrow, bigoted, and censorious. There was a sincere desire to better the State and a seeking and striving that did credit to a struggling people who were looking toward the future.

Sam Acheson in his recent book, 35,000 Days in Texas, says in his chapter "Sound Money and Sounder Morals":

Throughout the panic years public sentiment in both Dallas and Texas began to veer toward more Puritan standards on several moral questions. Organized religion was strengthening its influence on city councils and state legislatures.-----There was a growing sentiment against race track betting, a somewhat fanatical furor for moralizing the racetrack which "The News" felt, inclined to hold justifiable. The paper, in fact, was itself weering somewhat to the right in the matter of public morals. It was concerned over the growing ease and prolixity of divorce in Dallas-----

"Prize fighting?" an alderman asked, "What kind of families would care to move to Dallas to educate their children while they were confronted by sparring matches and variety theatres?"-----

On the question of "segregating fallen women" or "soiled doves", as "The News" was fond of styling

them, the city council acted the same year.-----

In 1895 "Retrenchment and Reform" was the slogan in the State capital.-----In June of the same year Eastern sports writers were first to announce that the long-hoped for fight between James Joseph Corbett and Robert Fitzsimmons for the championship of the world would be held without fail in Dallas in October. -----An Avalanche of objections were received from ministers and Christian Endeavorers. -----  
 "Better the exchequer of the State were emptied a hundred times than this foul indignity and outrage should be perpetrated," declared the Texas Christian Advocate. "We regret to see our State turned over for a month to the blackguards and gamblers of America." 72

Enough sentiment was aroused within the state, and the governor called a special session of the legislature and denounced prize fights and kindred practices in clear and unambiguous terms, so that this

"effront to the moral sense and enlightened progress of Texas may be averted." 73

As the nineties drew to a close, attention was being given to the fostering of the cultural as well as the physical development. Sam Acheson in 35,000 Days in Texas says:

After the dark ages of the depression, the theater revived in Dallas.-----A new generation of stars-----Otis Skimmer, Minnie Madden Fiske, Jessie Bartlett Davis and Barnaby's Bostonians and others-----came to fill the ranks of the order personages of the stage. -----Perhaps these first motion picture films ever shown in Dallas are worth noting-----a watermelon contest, a Mexican duel, scenes from Hoyt's A Milk White Flag, Broadway and Fourteenth Streets, a hanging scene, scene

72 Acheson, Sam, 35,000 Days in Texas, p. 202

73 Ibid., p. 204

in a blacksmith shop, haymaker's umbrella dance,  
lynching scene, fire rescue and Niagara Falls. 74

In 1900 Paderewski gave his first concert in Dallas. A young artist, Frank Reaugh, had discovered Texas as possible subject matter. Plays and books had their place in the columns of the newspapers.

Women were becoming more independent and seeking the right to vote and control the laws governing their homes and families. Carry A. Nation of Medicine Lodge, Kansas, became so indignant at the defiance of the liquor dealers and the laxness of officials of some of the towns that in 1900 she launched a crusade of her own and raided illegal saloons in Kansas and in Oklahoma. She emphasized to the public that the law was being violated. The woman's page of the Dallas News was edited by Mrs. W. A. Callaway (Pauline Periwinkle). It carried this comment in 1909.

The rabid, unreasoning prejudice against the "woman's movement" has almost entirely disappeared. -----We have become familiar with the literature, scientific, reformatory, religious and political phases of the woman's movement. 75

The work of Susan B. Anthony and other courageous women came to a successful end in 1920.

An article in the Atlantic Monthly by Charles Moreau Harper in 1902, says of the Kansan:

He is by nature a joiner, he delights in grips and passwords; lodges, camps and posts, consistories, temples, tribes and commanderies in bewildering

74 Acheson, Sam, 35,000 Days in Texas, p. 202

75 Ibid., p. 204

array attract him. The state always leads in contests with others for membership, card clubs, literary clubs, womens' federation balls and receptions. 76

It must have been this urge to join that made the Plains States so ripe a plum for the Ku Klux Klan organizers during the early twenties. The organization swept communities off their feet and nearly everyone was eager to join in its spectacular pageants, to revel in its alliterative titles, and to glory in its assumption of authority over the morals of the community. Few seemed to realize the menace to representative government and constituted authority, and the threat to personal and religious freedom. Educated, cultured citizens took up the slogans, titles, and roles and paraded, gave money to the churches, and attempted to make others moral by force. The last frontier had indeed changed. Those who had stood emphatically for the rights of the individual were now far from democratic in their treatment of their next door neighbor.

Mark Sullivan in Our Times the Twenties, which was published in 1935, gives the following as proof of the power of the Klan in this section of the country:

August, 1921.

Newspapers in all parts of the country gave increasing attention to a wave of lawlessness in Texas, Florida, and other parts of the South for which it was claimed the newly organized Ku Klux Klan was responsible. In Texas during the first six months of the year, forty-three persons, one of them a white woman, were tarred and feathered.

76 Atlantic Monthly, vol XC (September, 1902), p.37



The initials "K K K" were branded on the forehead of a negro bell boy. Indignant, the Dallas, Texas, "Journal" asserted that anarchy is terrifying the state with a bucket of tar and a sack of feathers. The Houston "Chronicle" denounced the terrorism and gave the Klan this advice: "Boys, you'd better disband. You'd better take your sheets, your banners, your masks, your regalia and make one big bonfire. Without pausing to argue over the objects you have in mind, it is sufficient to say that your methods are hopelessly wrong."

June 24.

A mass initiation of Klansmen at Tulsa, Oklahoma, was reported by the Tribune. One thousand and twenty men pledged allegiance to the Ku Klux Klan at a giant ceremonial, which lasted for hours last night on a pasture range about nine miles south east of the city on the Broken Arrow Road. They were inducted into Tulsa Klan No. 2 before a fiery cross seventy by twenty foot at one end of the immense pasture.-----More than thirty thousand motorists from Tulsa and surrounding towns tried to reach the scene of the spectacle but only a few thousand succeeded. The huge crowd was in ten thousand automobiles. Several small boys were able to view the entire spectacle. "Everyone melted before the flag and seemed to kiss it," one of the boys said. "It was awful solemn and spooky. White figures were every place."77

John M. K. Abbott, a special correspondent for the Outlook magazine, in an article entitled "Bill White and the Shirt-Tail Rangers" told how the Klan issue came out strong when the Republican convention met in Topeka in 1924. An attempt to get an anti-Klan plank in the platform failed, and when an anti-Klan resolution was about to come up on the floor the move to oppose it was headed by Paulin himself. It was this which decided Mr. White.

"The Klan put a gag on my party," he said. He just made up his mind that it was time for this fat bald-headed fellow from Emporia to put the Klan thing up to the folks. 78

77 Sullivan, Our Times the Twenties, pp 560-573

78 Abbott, Outlook, vol. 137 (November 5, 1924), pp. 360-361

So he decided to run for governor. In one campaign speech Abbott wrote about, Mr. White used picturesque epithets and startling original similes.

"One day there came up from Oklahoma," Mr. white will say in telling how Paulin came to be picked for the nomination, "a crowd of cyclopes,---and dragons,---and kledgles,---and furies and terrors, ---and wizards, and callilhumptions---and they held a meeting in Wichita with some Kansas genii---and pterodactyls---and whangdoodles." 79

"Shirt-Tail Ringers down in the cow pasture" is another favorite line. He changed the motto of Kansas to "Ad Astra per Cow Pasture".

From the Lawrence, Kansas, Daily Journal-world an incident is described which shows very aptly the feeling of Lawrence citizens during this period. The American Mercury tells how, when the opera "The Secret of Suzanne" was to be presented at Robinson's gymnasium, many of the townspeople, after reading a synopsis of the play, were indignant. Suzanne smoked cigarettes and her husband believed her unfaithful when he detected the odor of tobacco in his home, but when, eventually, he discovered her secret, in his relief he overlooked her use of tobacco.

W. A. McKeener, author of the Kansas anti-cigarette law, hastened to call upon University officials to inform them that because of the theme of the opera, it was not a proper production to be given under the auspices of the University where the insidious propaganda doubtless fostered by large tobacco interests might pervert the young students of the University. Mr. McKeener said today that a number of Lawrence people were alarmed over the opera. 30

79 Ibid., p. 561

80 American Mercury, vol. IV (February, 1925), p. 153

In the early '90's economic conditions were bad. Crops failed in the Plains States and interest was again aroused in the Farmer's Alliances. Finally the People's Party was organized. Some of the planks in their platform were: reduction of taxes, government ownership of railroads, prohibition of alien ownership of land and speculative investment in land. These last two demands illustrate vividly the disappearance of the good land of the public domain. The circulating medium was to be plentiful both in paper and silver, and silver was to be coined freely at a ratio with gold of 16 to 1.

The spirit of the party was well-expressed by the preamble of the platform which it adopted in 1892 when the convention met at Omaha:

We meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot box, the legislatures, the congress and even touches the ermine on the bench. The people are demoralized. The newspapers are largely subsidized or muzzled, public opinion silenced, business prostrated, our homes covered with mortgages, labor impoverished, and the land concentrated in the hands of the capitalists. Urban workmen are denied the right of organizing, imported pauperized labor reduces their wages, while a hireling army shoots them down. The toils of the millions are stolen to build up colossal fortunes. From the prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes-----tramps and millionaires.----Health belongs to him who created it and every dollar taken from industry is robbery. 31

Kansas Republicans and Democrats tried to fix up their platforms so as to catch the popular vote. They put in a plank for the resubmission of the prohibitory amendment to the voters of the state. The Republicans fell back on the "Old Soldiers" plea which had proved

31 Riegel, America Moves West, p. 528

effective. They discovered when too late that they had been out-generated by the Populists, who had elected to seize upon some issue and had chosen two hundred Civil War Veterans as delegates to their state convention, giving the Old Soldiers more than one-third of the voting power of the convention.

There were waves of prosperity during this period. During some years the crops of wheat and corn brought in a surge of prosperity. The World War price of wheat was more than two dollars. Then, too, oil was found in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas. Cattle still were a source of income, not to large ranches but to every farm.

From 1895 to 1915 prosperity returned. There were bumper wheat crops and prices rose. The plains farmer was happy. Everyone felt himself wealthy. Farm lands were bought and sold at fictional values and new stock, machinery, and buildings were added as rapidly as possible. Farmers were leaving their farms to renters and were moving to town to build huge, pretentious houses, ugly monuments to poor taste which in the small towns are today remodeled and used as apartments for the members of the school faculty with small families or for the oil men who come to the locality to remain for a short time.

The renter of the retired farmer's land had a hard time of it. The landlord did not want to put any money into his farm. The renter, as a rule, had no capital to invest and his lot was a distressing one.



Ruth Suckow in "Renters" shows the heartlessness of the landlords to the renter.

The Mutchlers were:

A shabby country family. Fred, a lank, skimmy fellow, with thin, light hair and bad teeth, several of them gone; a good natured, ingenuous face that was getting vaguely cynical; yet with an indefinite look of youth about him. Beth--at the same time stocky and thin, with the worried-looking face of the driven mother. When she went into the grocery store to do her buying she stood back among other rather silent, bashful women, the baby in her arms, Ben and Harold hanging near her.--- She never felt like pushing forward to the counter. The Mutchlers were not good pay. \$2

Fred Mutchler was a renter on the old Hunt place. He had been there now for four years. He had come a few years after old man Hunt's death.----"Old Lady Hunt" found fault with him as she did with all renters. Fred had worked out as a hired man and had met Beth working in a farmer's kitchen. They were married and became renters. Then began the succession of farm renting, crop failures, and babies.

They had all sorts of bad luck. Fred had cut his foot and blood poisoning had set in; little Ben had had infantile paralysis and was left with a crippled leg. But, now, on Hunt's farm they were getting along so well that the children had food and clothing, and debts were being paid.

Sometimes Beth and Fred went through old useless arguments:

"We ain't never going to make anything. Why don't we go into town and quit trying to get anywhere farming?"

"What better off would we be in town? What do you think we'd do there?-----

There was no answer to that. ----Crops were looking fine around Concordia this year.----

"Gosh, Beth, things do look good. You ought to see that west forty. I'd like to have Old Mother Hunt take a look at it."

"What's she know about it?" Beth said contemptuously.

"Well, I'd like to show her what kind of crops her farm can raise when it has to."

"She's raise the rent is about what she'd do." 83

Fred worked hard. Mrs. Edwin Foster drove her big car out one afternoon with Mrs. Hunt, her mother, in the back seat. After stopping at the house to pick most of the ripening raspberries to take to town, the women drove over to the field where Fred was working.

That evening Fred related how "Old Lady Hunt" had driven by the field and said that "dear nephew Milton thinks he'd like to try his hand at farming----and so they felt they should let him come out here on their own land." Milton, Fred knew, was a thin, pimpled youth who wore colored silk socks and spent his time around the pool halls. Fred had had an understanding about staying longer, but what could he do about it?

"Oh, well, it's their farm. They can do what they please with it, I 'spose.----If they'd told me this spring even. But they were afraid I mightn't work, just the same. And I wouldn't have either.---"

"Well, if you ain't gona rent, what are you gona do?" she demanded.

"I don't know," he muttered after a while. "What is there to do?"

She was silent, but her lips moved in bitter soundless

comments. Easy was what he was. He would still work for them. They would be renters all their lives. 84

Chester I. Crowell, editor of an Austin, Texas, newspaper tells in an article how when a boy in 1919 he moved to north Texas. The people there called Bexar County, of which San Antonio is the county seat, "Beer County." His playmates asked him if the people at San Antonio spoke English. Mr. Crowell found that in north Texas children were taught that the wine of the Cana feast contained no alcohol. Dancing was treated as a terrible sin. If the young folks danced they were "churched". The possession of a deck of cards was a monstrous sin. On one occasion Mr. Crowell ordered by mail several victrola records and dared to play them in a country hotel. The manager politely requested him to desist, explaining that his innocent children could not avoid hearing the music. The records were recordings of opera. The state university faculty had to declare every year that they were not teaching socialism or atheism. Rural legislators hurled charges against them regularly. In consequence the professors were frightened men. The only spontaneous, delightful human being Mr. Crowell met was a young professor named Start Young, who talked with a great deal of enthusiasm about the drama and was planning to produce several plays. He did not remain very long.

Ruth Cross in her story "Stuff of Youth" gives much the same picture. It is a story of North Texas. Myrtie Jennings had recently moved there. The opening scene of the story is at Irvie Willis' birthday party, the last merrymaking of the summer. 84 Ibid.

Tomorrow the cotton picking season would begin. Myrtie had been snubbed and humiliated. Her white frock fell away a trifle more at the throat than Law's Chapel frocks were wont to do. Irvie had consoled her when he found her sobbing outside and had promised her he would choose her the rest of the evening. So the gossip had started.

"Irvie's going with Laura Hansel, 'most engaged to her, I reckon," Hannah told Myrtie.

Now Hannah Lumpkin was "a lone and meddlesome old woman," as she called herself, and she was befriending Myrtie against the town gossips.

Myrtie's eyes came back to Hannah. "Gib Perkins is 'most engaged to her too, isn't he?" she asked with disarming ingenuousness.

Gossip was going the rounds!

"Seen his horse tied at the gate"-----"a vain silly little thing, as dresses finer she'd ort--- Her ma and sister away off in the fields-----I think his ma ought to be told but I don't feel it's my place to do it."

Finally the scandal broke. It seems that some mischievous boys had followed Irvie and the little Jennings girl down to the graveyard and had seen them kissing.

"---They're trying to brace old Elder Day up to call on the Jennings girl's mother and demand that they leave this part of the country."

A pie supper was held and Gib and Irvie's bid up to twenty-five dollars for Myrtie's pie. After the pie supper prayer meeting was held. Hannah led the meeting and her text was taken from



the third chapter of James. The subject was "A Gossiping Tongue". Hannah preached her sermon with telling effect. After the benediction Irvie and Myrtie came up to Elder Day and asked him to marry them.

"Don't think, either, it's because of your silly tales. There's the license.---I've been carrying it for weeks. I've begged Myrtie to marry me, an' she wouldn't because of the way you all kept treatin' her. She said it wasn't fair to me----Now we're going to be married an' if we ain't good enough to live in Law's Chapel, they's other places a plenty to live. So---fire away!" 85

"The Day of the Cyclone" by Octave Thanet is written about Iowa, but it could easily have been in Kansas or any other Plains State. Captain Barris came in on the accommodation train; he asked a townsman where he could get a glass of beer.

"Kin I tell you where you kin get a glass of beer?-- No, young man, I cain't; and I'd advise you to quit huntin' up beer, or ye won't wear sich good clo'se long. Anyhow, ye won't find no beer in Grinnell."

"What's the trouble with Grinnell?"

"The trouble is, it's a prohibition town; and prohibition in Grinnell does prohibit. There ain't a saloon in the place. Ye cayn't get a drop of intoxicatin' liquor, not a drop-----"

Here his underjaw fell, his eyeballs fixed themselves in a dismal stare; and the didactic forefinger that had been sawing the air was paralyzed midway, so that it pointed straight to the red-faced man reeling around the corner.

"Perhaps he could tell me," said Archy. 86

Later Archy found out the man he had met was the father of Rachel, the girl he hoped to marry.

"I've looked ye over and ye won't do," said he, you're a drinkin' man-----

"I don't take no stock in moderate drinkers; if

85 Cross, "Stuff of Youth", American Magazine, vol.99 (June, 1925), pp.29-31

86 Thanet, "The Day of the Cyclone", Moulton, Short Stories, pp. 162-187

they're too coldblooded to go to perdition themselves, they lead other folks there, and I ain't sure but that's worse. You are a Democrat and a aristocrat, Ramsay says you ain't a professor of religion--just a sort of 'piscopal. We ain't got an opinion in common."---

Then Archy went to talk to Rachel:

"----it's all true what my father says; we are altogether different. The people you go with laugh at the things I have been taught were the most important. They all earnest Christian people 'prigs', and your mother was so surprised when I told her I belonged to the W.C.T.U. and said, 'Oh, my dear, doesn't that sort of thing stamp one.' She made me feel as though I had confessed to having been in jail. Captain Barris, your mother is ashamed of me. And you would be if you married me. You are ashamed of my folks." 87

Archy left to wander through the town; then the tornado struck and he got his chance to prove his worth by saving lives. He saved a Miss Baker whom Old Meadows (Rachel's father) was to marry. (He really thought he was saving Rachel at the time.) He worked with Meadows helping victims of the tornado throughout the night, and then at daybreak returned to see Rachel, as they were to settle it themselves now, for he and her father had become "great chums," though it took a "cyclone" to bring them to an understanding of each other.

Camp meetings and revivals became a business in the years 1905-1917. Great tents were hauled from place to place and set up in vacant lots or pastures, and people came from miles around to be "saved" or "revived". Fanaticism and religious fervor woke the small towns into a ferment and the upheaval was equal to a tornado.

Many of the preachers and workers were sincere and honest, but not all of them.

Don Marquis tells the story in "The Meeting" of a woman revivalist.

Hazelton was in the throes of a series of meetings, conducted by a woman evangelist, which were shaking the little town from center to circumference.--Miss Chris Carson knew how to stir things up and keep them stirred up----Dozens of the newly "saved" left her meetings weak, trembling, pale and exhausted with the stress of their religious or nervous experiences, but it gave Miss Carson a kind of bloom; one might have said she bathed in all this electricity and was invigorated thereby.----She had been born and brought up, as the saying is, "in a wardrobe trunk", her parents were seasoned troupers--vaudeville, burlesque, circus, concern, "hall show or tent show". She had got out of vaudeville herself, and upon the Chautauqua circuit; after a few seasons of that she went into evangelistic work, where she was an instant success.<sup>88</sup>

The influence of the evangelist on the youth of the town was not entirely wholesome. Some wrote poetry to her, some were madly in love with her, while others discussed her figure. Clark Andrews had abandoned his lady love for this new love, who was twelve or fourteen years his senior. Fatty had made comments on her figure. It struck him (Clark) as rather low in Fatty to make such a remark about this woman--this kind of woman! Fatty was rather low at times, now that he reflected upon it. Gross! Not the sort of person, after all, with whom one could discuss his inmost thoughts.

Miss Carson had the figure and knew it, and went to considerable trouble to keep it from getting away from her, so to speak.

<sup>88</sup> Marquis, Harper's Magazine, vol. 159 (October, 1929), pp. 592-604

The last thing she did every night before she turned in, and the first thing every morning before she dressed, was to inflict upon herself the torture of a solid rubber roller guaranteed to make the all too solid flesh of humanity melt, thaw, and dissolve itself into a dew.

Cigarette smoking was one of the evils preached against by Miss Carson. She was not, however, above doing it herself. But ten years ago in little places such as Hazelton, a woman who smoked was often suspected of being "fast". And of course it would never do for an evangelist, even now. Miss Carson occasionally got to the place where she had to have a whiff or two of a cigarette or perish--any old smoker of either sex will sympathize with her sufferings.

Her exhortation is familiar to all those who have attended such meetings. And sad but true, her type was not unknown. Usually the male of the species predominated. Many a scamp took hundreds of dollars away from a local community while the struggling ministers of the town went unpaid.

"----All of you who have found salvation, remember that you are soldiers on the Lord's side tonight; remember that the Lord is watching you; He has got His eye on you; He is looking to you to help Him and stand by Him. If there are any cowards or sneaks or shirkers here, it's no place for them! You brothers and sisters who are saved, the Lord puts it right square up to you to line up with me and fight the Devil for the souls of those who ain't saved!

"I want you to sing that song, all of you---- I'll play over the first verse, and then we'll sing it. And remember while you sing it that it means fight! Get the fight into it. Get the fight into



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it loud and clear! Let the Devil know we're here to fight, and he can't bluff us!"

The congregation--three-fourths of them were officially "saved" already--after this brief and rousing plea, dashed into the song with a vim and fervor which made the "unsaved" fourth begin to quake a little, thus early in the proceedings.

-----The whole program worked gradually upward and upward toward that climax when the shouting would begin, when members of the congregation themselves would begin to weep, exhort, and pray, when individuals, convicted of unregeneracy, would begin to break away from the seats of sin and stumble sobbing toward the mourner's bench. In order to hasten this excited condition in the audience, a dozen or so volunteer assistant exhorters would pass from seat to seat, pleading personally with such sinners as showed signs of weakening and usually leading them, triumphantly forward.<sup>89</sup>

Gullible, perhaps, but always sincere and God-fearing and believing that those called of God could not be evil, the Plains people had yet to learn that the wicked stand at times in the high places.

Fleta Campbell Springer is not so cynical or bitter in her story, "Ceremony in White," but her feeling for the "saved" takes an unusual form with which one sympathizes. It is a story of an Oklahoma town. Lexie had grown up with Mal but had been away from the town for nearly three years.

From the beginning it had been the same. Even in those earliest years--and Mal and Lexie had been among the very first children in the little Oklahoma town-----when they had walked to school together every morning in wintertime, Lexie had never thought of Mal as a chum as other girls had been. Mal had never seemed to need a chum. They had never had secrets together or told each other what they thought about, and Lexie's memories of Mal were never of conversations, but of activities. Not that Mal was silent, or that you felt a lack in her.

She talked enough for Mal. She would tell you how to do things, teach you how to whistle loud through your fingers or shrill through a blade of grass, how to make a horse breathe in before you tightened your saddle girth. She would tell you the names of things and, if you asked, what she had done yesterday or was going to do today.

Mal didn't like "niggers"; she always called them that. Lexie could still see Mal's straight back stiffen, her head go up, and her walk go faster when one of the black children called out "hello" to Lexie as they passed. They soon stopped calling out when Mal was along and only waved timidly and mouthed "hello" when Lexie looked around. Their faces looked so scared and their eyes so merry that Lexie wondered how anybody could help liking them. But Mal disliked them, "hated them", she said, for no more apparent reason than she disliked cats, spotted ponies, turtles, reading books, persimmons, white dresses, and the blue flower they called "indigo". And she disliked them forever. She didn't change her mind. Lexie wished she knew how Mal decided things. She seemed to have some secret way of making up her mind. When she was eight she had given up playing with dolls. "I don't play dolls any more." - - -

Now that Lexie had returned home and began to ask about Mal, everyone seemed to shun the subject. But she soon found out that Mal Baxter was "pretty wild". She was being talked about and nobody spoke to her any more. One day Lexie met her on the street. Without slowing or quickening her pace, without even taking her eyes from Lexie's eager, astonished gaze, Mal swerved slightly outward to avoid the outstretched arm, and strode straight on, leaving Lexie staring after her. Her eyes had been clear and proud. They had not wavered but looked straight through Lexie as if she were not there. Stunned and bewildered by something that had certainly been like scorn in Mal's dark eyes, Lexie, still gazing helplessly after her, saw two women, Mrs. Mills, the banker's wife, and Miss Evans, the teacher, emerge from the post office directly in Mal's path, saw Mal go past them as if they were made of air.

Not speaking to Mal?-----Mal was not speaking to the town!

One day Lexie was waiting to have a prescription filled at the drug store when a young man came in and ordered a "coke" and said to the clerk: "Did you hear about the preacher calling on Mal Baxter?"

"I did!" said John, and they both laughed.

"He won't try that again," said the boy.

"Well, he certainly had his nerve," said John.

-----Lexie could imagine the scene--yet she didn't imagine it except for that first instant's vision of Mal standing straight and tall in a door, with Mr. Foster, hat in hand, outside on the ground, looking up at her and flushing, his stringy neck with the Adam's apple working, his weak moist eyes behind his glasses looking as if he were about to cry, stammering, trying to speak, flayed by the blazing scorn in Mal's eyes and voice.

Then came the day when a group of girls brought her the latest news concerning Mal:

"Oh, she hasn't heard! She hasn't heard!" said Ruth.  
 "She didn't go. You missed it, Lex! Mal Baxter was saved last night!"

"Repented. Came to Jesus."

"It was marvelous."

Far away a blow had fallen.

All their faces were turned to her, eager, lighted with excitement to find she hadn't heard.

"I----can't believe it," she said weakly.

"Nobody could believe it when they saw her coming down the aisle."

"She nearly fell, if the preacher hadn't caught her----" Not Mal----Not Mal---not Mal! - - - - -

Oh, she had seen them stumbling, broken, convulsively sobbing, go down that aisle to the waiting outstretched hands--the weak ones, the timid ones, the ones who were afraid--but not Mal, not Mal, not Mal.

"Can you imagine Mal Baxter leaning on Mr. Foster, letting him shake hands with her?"

"Can you imagine her letting old Mrs. Burkus kiss her on both cheeks?"

"She looked," said Dave, "as if something had been broken inside her. "It was pretty awful to see her cry." 90

The next day the open-air revival ended. There was to be a river baptizing and the whole town would be there. Lexie went

90 Springer, "Ceremony in White," Harper's, vol. 162 (September, 1931), pp. 456-467

to see the triumph of Mal:

Whatever had happened last night, she would be herself today. She would not be there, not be there for them to look at, laugh at, triumph over. They could not conquer Mal.

"She won't change her mind." Cordy's voice, surperior, the old note of triumph in it, triumph over Lexie, triumph over Mal. "She's had enough. You could see how scared she was."

And this was so false that now she knew that Mal would not be there.

There was a singing in the air, a high, many-voiced singing that rose and fell across the river as if the light itself were audible. On the opposite bank a group of vari-colored figures lined the river's edge. Against them the tall, black-garbed figure of the evangelist, arms outstretched and rigid, stood out starkly like a somber living cross. At his right, a smaller group, white-robed and motionless.

The impossible was happening. This could not be Mal. Now in a moment she would waken, come to life, wrench free, and hurl defiance to them all. But steadily, slowly-swiftly they came on, borne by the singing voices like an incantation, like a spell.

----Farewell to that strong arrogant Mal, gone down to failure and defeat. Farewell to all high courage, recklessness, and pride, and the beautiful blazing scorn----quenched forever, drowned, put out. Farewell to the bold, imperious Mal, capitulated, fallen, failed.

, To Lexie a soul like Mal should know no surrender.<sup>91</sup>

The story shows the spirit of the younger generation in contract to their elders.

Narrowness is shown in many local color stories written about this period. In "Closed Roads," by Hyatt Downing, Danny is kept from a musical career because of his father's hatred of music.

The story is told in the first person by an implement salesman, who is going out to take a mortgage on a few head of thin

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.



milch cows and work stock:

I had to drive carefully through the yard to avoid rusted heaps of old, worn out machinery, and bits of broken boards and tangled coils of wire, red with weathering. A pig, thin and underfed, was rooting at the white fluff of a dead chicken. To the sagging barn, half covered with straw, I was directed by the sound of blows being struck on metal. There I found my man, working on a wagon-tire. ----It was then that I first noticed the boy. He was standing quite still in the wagon-box, holding the reins in hands blue with cold. He wore an old sheep-lined coat, too big for him. It was fastened tight at the throat with a large safety pin. He regarded me with a steady, unsmiling gaze. Nor did he answer my bluff, "Hello there, son." There was something in the boy's face that held me, a gravity far beyond his ten or twelve years, as delicacy of line and feature, a sensitive mouth which I thought, might be handsome when lighted by a smile. "Son," I said, "you're going to lose money on that coat if you don't sell it pretty soon." I was immediately sorry, for his eyes fell, and he fumbled nervously with the lines.

It was late when I finished my business with Mr. Bartels. His condition was so much like that of all the others, I could have told what he had to say before he spoke. Except that he seemed a little more despondent. He had little. His wheat had gone for next to nothing because the bank forced him to sell at an unfavorable time. Cholera had killed half his hogs. Because of the protracted drought there was little alfalfa; as a consequence, most of his milch cows were going dry. "I'm takin' another hundred and sixty for hay land," he said. "And wild hay's pretty sure--if a prairie fire don't come along." And so I didn't ask for a mortgage on his few head of stock. - - -

True to tradition of the country, he asked me to spend the night. - - - - -

We ate supper in the kitchen. Mr. Bartels asked the blessing, giving thanks for the favors of God. Favors! You can't laugh off that kind of religion.

After the evening meal was over and the dishes were done, the family and the visitor were in the parlor.

----Presently his mother spoke with timid pride:  
"Can't you play for the gentlemen, Danny?"

But the boy went into the bedroom. He came back with a violin-case under his arm. He was taut with excitement, and his fingers trembled as he unfastened the clasps of the old black box. The violin itself was new and shiny. "My mother bought this," he said holding it tenderly in his hands. It was a simple statement of fact, and the first time he had spoken, yet I had a swift vision of the pennies, dimes, quarters, hoarded, one at a time, from the milk and egg money. It was obviously cheap, but no Stradivarius could have meant more. Then Danny began to play.

I know more about tractors than I do about music; but it seems to me that any dub can feel certain kinds of music. Danny's was of that kind. The notes were full and round and, I thought, he played without hesitation or uncertainty. But he seemed ill at ease and kept glancing at his father.

"Boy, that's great! Wonderful! You ought to go to one of these music schools," I found myself saying excitedly. It was so unexpected that, for a moment, it lifted me out of machinery.

"He'll never go to no music school and be a long-haired damn fool." I turned. Bartels was talking with a sort of suppressed fury. "There never was a fiddler that was worth his salt. They're all alike. Don't I know?"

The next morning when I got ready to leave, I called Danny around a corner of the house and put a ten-dollar bill in his hand. "Buy some music, kid," I said, "and say, I was just joshing about that coat, you know."

Several years went by and one day the implement dealer was attending a convention of agriculturists:

It was one of those hot, sticky afternoons in the latter part of July and a sort of settled apathy hung over the meeting. There seemed to be a hopelessness

in the speakers' voices, a recognition of the inevitable futility of everything they might do. Crops were bringing less on the market than they cost to raise, and getting lower. It was pretty depressing. I listened for a while, and was just about to get up and go out when a young fellow in the audience began talking.

"This meeting was called to outline a definite programme of resistance," he said. "So far there hasn't been anything done to cause the public to think we even want more for our produce. It has been just a moaning meeting. And it seems to me that's typical of farmers everywhere. We talk about organization!" Here the youth laughed scornfully. "Organization! Without exception every co-operative society we have established has been a failure. Why? Because we hire incompetent men to run our stores and elevators, men that reputable business concerns have probably kicked out long ago. I'm a farmer, and I haven't any sympathy for myself nor for you. There never was a group of farmers that could hang together long enough to achieve any important result. We plant all the sun will give us time to get in, hire a lot of expensive help to get it harvested before hail strikes, raise a bumper crop, and sell it to a glutted market in America in competition with the world! But we continue to weep and plant corn and wheat."

After the meeting Danny and his old friend met.

-----"Hello, Danny," I said. "Did you buy that music?"

Presently, over a couple of cold drinks in a nearby drug-store, he answered my question. "No, I didn't buy music. Your ten dollars bought some fence-posts and a wire-stretcher. What is Schubert compared to the practical utility of a wire-stretcher? And, besides, my father hated music, you know." 92

This is not the way the story ended but this is enough to show the struggle of the farmer to meet obligations and his view of anything not practical. Music would not bring in bread and

butter and that was the all-important thing in a land of crop failure and despondency.

Another story by Hyatt Downing, "Rewards", is the story of Anna Walrod and her repressed, stifled desires and longing; but she has built up a dream of what her boy will become. Her own sensitive nature is shown by her personification of the cream separator. She is coming home at dusk:

As she turned into the yard, her ears were assailed by the high shrill whine of whirling gears. The kitchen door was open, and she could see the giant shadow of her husband moving with machine-like regularity.---How she hated that separator. The slightly sickening odor which rose from its bowl, when scalding water was run through after the milk, was always with her. The machine had come to possess a sort of malignant personality. The first thing to be attended to in the morning, it was the last leering task at night before thin sleep, fretful with weariness, spread over her. Each day it was there, alive and grinning, conscious of its multitude of grease-coated disks and floats and bowls.

Her husband paused in the act of pulling off his heavy boots as she entered the kitchen.-----"Christ's sake! What took you so long? I suppose I ain't hungry. Workin' like a dog all day long and no supper!" - - - - -  
 "-----No use settin' a place for Eustace. Ain't likely he'll be home." There was a leering satisfaction in the voice. -----"I seen him ridin' off as I come in from the field. All slicked up and headed for Schultze's.-----"

That very afternoon Anna had been to town to see her banker.

She saw again the respect and admiration in Mr. Dellinger's smile as he showed her the figures he had kept all these years and known only to themselves. Fifteen hundred dollars and it was hers! She had saved it. Fifteen years of pinching poverty, of stealing a quarter of a dollar at a time, of lying to Jake about cream checks and the number of eggs taken to town.----Any boy with fifteen hundred dollars in his pocket ought to be able to get through



any school in the country, if he had ambition and really wanted an education. But what was the trouble. Did Eustace really want an education?-----That foolish Schultze girl. Why didn't she leave him alone?---- When Eustace was quite small she had often sat upon this same bench with him until long after his bedtime, conjuring up visions of her boy following out the destinies which she, if not God, had decided upon for him. Here in Dakota He seemed very unreal and remote. When they first came she got down on her knees each night in the hot black little box of a bedroom and prayed that the crops would be bountiful, that the hot winds would spare them, that anthrax would not strike their cattle, that Jake, her husband, would love her always. But the crops curled and withered at the touch of scorching winds; black leg and anthrax almost wiped out their small herd. Neighbors surrendered in despair and moved away, and in two years everything with which they had begun life so hopefully in Dakota was gone. Jake became sullen and embittered. He, too, would have gone with the discouraged claim-holders back to Iowa, or Minnesota, or Wisconsin to work by the day or be renters for the rest of their lives. But Anna hung on.

After Anna's baby had come all her dreams and efforts had been to have for him all that she had desired out of life. He would never be a farmer.----- Eustace was a young man, waiting to enter college in a few more days.-----She felt vaguely uneasy about Eustace. He shouldn't stay out so late. That foolish Schultze girl, with her brassy laugh and red lips. She was glad it was nearly time for him to go.

Restless Anna, waiting for her son to return, finally went to his room and found a note.

"I can't do it, Ma.-----Bertha and I are getting married.-----Don't worry about college, Ma.-----I would rather farm." 93

In the story "Miss Jessie's Change of View", Homer Montfort tells of Miss Jessie, who is an old maid but whose views on spending money out of town are but the reflection of the town merchants in

any small Plains State town.

The little town of Barryville seemed very peaceable indeed as it lay like some great animal, sprawling in the June sunshine. The "Courier" office was no exceptional part. In the composing room the printer dreamily gazed alternately at his "copy" for the greatest corn cure on earth, and the usual complement of loungers on the public square.----In the sanctum Miss Jessie, the editor, reporter and business manager of the "Courier" was making slow headway with an article on "The Evil of Spending Money Out of Our Own Town". She had just completed several strong points against the "foreign job-printing evil", and was preparing to land a knock-out blow upon the circus which "sweepeth down like a bird of prey, seizes the people's money in its great, greedy talons, and soars away again", when there appeared in the doorway a handsome, well dressed young man, who upon perceiving the sex of the incumbent of the sanctum bowed profusely.

He wished to place a full page ad in the paper. Miss Jessie decided to charge \$100 so that he would not advertise. He placed a roll of bills on the desk.

Circus day came and with it came people from every direction.-----Long before time for the parade, the hitching posts on the square were crowded with all sorts of vehicles and many were hitching in the out-skirts of the town.

After the parade had passed Miss Jessie returned to her work on the unfinished article. The article seemed badly overdrawn and after all, the people seemed to look upon circus day as a big event, rather than a calamity, and why should the Courier stand out against that which met with public favor? She rolled the manuscript, placed it in a pigeon-hole, and left the office. 94

94 Montfort, "Miss Jessie's Change of View" Kansas Magazine, vol.3 (January, 1910), pp. 32-34

"It's never Too Late to Live" by Bess Streeter Aldrich, is a pathetic story of Ella Burke, whose stingy, hard-hearted old husband has died. Ella goes on a spending spree.

Old Ella Burke climbed laboriously down from the ramshackle buggy, walked gingerly around the heads of the heavy horses standing stolidly in the muddy gutter, and tied them to the one of the two hitching-posts left in town.

Jake Burke had died suddenly. Old Ella went to the bank and found that he had mortgages, bonds, and cash, and they gave her a check book. She was dazed. Jake had made her believe that there was barely enough to scrape together to pay the taxes. She had slaved all her life and it had not been necessary.

The business call was over. And it was well for old Ella that she did not hear Mr. Victor Mapes' comment when she was gone.

"Administrator!" he was saying acridly to the older president. "Guardian---that's what that estate needs, and it's what there will have to be in a few months. She's no more competent to handle money than a child."

"Oh--I don't know." Mr. Howard was more optimistic. "I think she's all right. She'll be competent."-----

When she passed the country cemetery with its abandoned church standing back in a cluster of cotton-woods, she did not look that way. Her heart thumped strangely at its acknowledged lack of sorrow and reverence. All the little meannesses, all the larger trials of her life were accentuated now. She recalled those first few years of tears--and then when there had been no tears--nothing but a dull acquiescence of life. All the way home she felt hard and triumphant.

The next day she was at the back door of the Reider Memorial Home for orphans. She took Ella May home with her for a visit. The next day she took her butter and eggs to town and purchased clothing,

a galvanized wash-tob, a banjo, a set of dishes, oak rocking-chair with a blue plush bottom, and a fat lamp with a frosted globe shade. She and Ella May unpacked a dozen glass tumblers, a checked tablecloth of a varied redness, and a half dollar's worth of peppermints.

On Saturday morning the work of the Prairie Hill State Bank was well under way, the six employees speeding up their labors in preparation for the usual busy farmer trade of the afternoon. Toward noon, Mr. Victor P. Mapes came up the president's desk, snapping a bunch of checks nervously against his hand.

"Look here, Tom, What did I tell you? That old Mrs. Burke's checks,-----Overdrawn. Way overdrawn. As far as I can see there's a big check here from practically every store in town."-----

"Well-----What do you think of her now?" Mr. Mapes urged.

Thomas R. Howard grinned. "Just what I thought at first----that she's not incompetent. She'll be careful later. But I would say right now she's on a spree. When she sobers up, I bet she'll be as stingy as the old man homself."

Old Ella's only purchase that showed poor business judgment, according to her, was the sandwiches at the "Sunset Caf-fee", where she sold her eggs for thirty-eight cents a dozen and went to the front door and "bought two of 'em back in sandwiches for forty cents." 95

County seat wars lasted up into the nineties. Sam N. Wood of Kansas was probably the last to be killed in such a feud. He was

95 Aldrich, "It's Never too Late to Live", Delineator, vol. 118 (January, 1931), pp. 10-11, 75-77



slain at the door of a church at Hugoton. The narrowness of such feelings of civic pride is shown in "The Triumph of Sand Hill" by Eleanor E. Carpenter. On the high hill behind them overlooking the river and valley "Old Man Sanders" reigned as King of Sand Hill. He was called the "father" of Sand Hill. In the pretty green valley across the river Gordon Rathburn Harston reigned as grand-uncle and chief advisor and administrator to the village of Clear Creek. Clear Creek had a court house. Sand Hill did not--and was covetous. The fight had been long and bitter. Now a railroad was coming as fast as construction could be carried on. Both towns had centered on the fight to get it as with it would come the assurance of the court house as a permanent institution. What the railroad meant to do was still a secret, as neither town had had much money to put up as a bonus.---

-----Of late rumors had spread that Sand Hill was going to get the depot.-----Already numbers of citizens of Clear Creek were moving bag and baggage to Sand Hill.

-----The following day all was excitement in the rival towns, for it was known as a settled fact Sand Hill has secured the railroad. Sand Hill had sent its dozen piece band and it was a gala day. Flags were flying, and speeches were made on the great future of Sand Hill. Clear Creek, on the other hand, went into mourning----

-----In a few days the exodus began. Like rats deserting a sinking ship, families were crossing the river to get in on the ground floor of the boom at Sand Hill. Some, not satisfied with just taking their household goods, and who owned their own homes, loaded the frame structures on wheels and took them along. The town each day became more deserted and dismantled. 96

96 Carpenter, "The Triumph of Sand Hill," Kansas Magazine, vol.6 (November, 1911), pp. 60-66

The story "Going to the Fourth" by Dora Aydelotte appeared in the Forum. This story is full of pictures that some of us have not forgotten. The oldest girl, Barby, tells the story.

Pa said more than once, "Now you work good, and mabbe we'll all go to the Fourth."

So you got up early and weeded the veg'table patch. you gathered the eggs, fed the chickens. You drove the cows home from pasture. You helped Ma in the kitchen-- washing dishes, peeling potatoes, stirring batter in a hugh bowl, churning until your thin arms ached. And Ma would encourage you with "that's right. You help good and mabby Pa'll take us to the Fourth!"

---Pa was sitting in the barrel-stave hammock, smoking his pipe. You went out and asked if he thought it would rain. He squinted up at the sky, all bright with stars, and said, "Oh, I guess we'll have nice weather."-----

The big cookstove sent out waves of sultry heat. Ma had baked break that day. She had made an amazing number of cakes and pies.----

Ma turned around from the stove, pushed back a lock of wet hair from her perspiring forehead. Tall, angular figure in faded blue calico. Thin, sallow face. Thin lips not given to much smiling. Tired, kindly gray eyes. Dark hair strained back from her forehead twisted into a tight, hard knot on top of her head.---

You climbed the stairs to that stifling little room under the eaves where you and Minnie slept. You got out your "Best" clothes. Black buttoned shoes with spring heels. Black cotton stockings. White ruffled petticoats. Stiffly starched white dress, with tucks in the skirt so it could be let down. Straw sailor with a blue band. Everything spread out grandly on a chair by your bed. In bed, your hand stroked lovingly the crisp folds of that white dress.----Your shoes squeaked delightfully as you ran downstairs.

Pa said, "Go on and eat. I already asked the blessing." You gazed at him with admiration verging upon awe. He did look grand in his Sunday-go-to-meeting black suit. Pa was a big man. He had big black eyes and black hair, and the longest black mustache. He was drinking coffee out of his mustache cup ~~you gave him~~ for Christmas. Ed, the hired man, gulped hot coffee from his saucer. He was all dressed up in his best suit.

Ma was flying around getting the dinner ready. Everything was packed in a big wooden washtub, covered with a clean red-and-white tablecloth. After Pa and Ed

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carried the tub out to the wagon they came back and Bill helped them take out the chairs. You couldn't to to the Fourth in style unless you sat on chairs in the back of the wagon. Some folks put down straw and spread old quilts over, but that was tacky. The two extra chairs were for Gramma and Aunt Min. You would stop by for them on the way to town.----The air was fresh and cool. You smelled the sweet clover, the dewy grass. Wagons jogged in from every side road. Young men with their best girls dashed past in buggies. You wished you could go to the Fourth in some young man's shiny buggy, behind a team of prancing bay horses. Then you looked down at hands all sunburned and briar-scratched, and sighingly remembered your face, dotted over with the fat brown freckles.-----

As you drove into town there was a delightful pop-pop of torpedoes on the wooden sidewalks. Fire-crackers exploded sharply. Tom and Jerry snorted and rared up, but Pa held them in. Ma said, "Look at the way those fellows tried to pass us. Somebody's due to get killed, driving so fast." The dust rose in stifling, swirling clouds.---

When you got to Green's grove it seemed like you must be the last ones there. But you looked back, and there were wagons and buggies and men riding horseback and some folks walking--all coming to the Fourth.

-----You got thirsty, and Pa took you to a barrel of water with a piece of ice in it and a tin cup tied on a string, and said, "Drink all you want--it's free."

A fat man got up and made a speech--you didn't know what about--but everybody clapped hard and you did, too.-----

Proudly you ordered lemon pop while Minnie got strawb'ry. Then you both got white chewing gum hearts with pictures on them, and some cocoanut candy flags, and some lickerish-----

After dinner, you and Minnie went right over to the merry-go-round. It was a dazzling thing, all painted in light blue and red. An old mule went round and round the post to make it go. The man cracked his whip and shouted "All 'board here--fi' cents a ride! Lady 'at sets with the fiddler gets to ride free!"-----

You wished Pa and Ma could see you now--you Barby Miller, a freckle-face country girl sitting up there in the free seat by the fiddler. 97

Rural delivery of mail, telephone, radio, good roads, and the automobile all have had their part on these great plains with making the farmer increasingly independent of his physical environment. If he can travel long distances in a short time, know what is going on over all the world, and tune in a symphony concert being played in New York or in Los Angeles, it is not so easy to become melancholy and disheartened and the distance to his nearest neighbor becomes less important.

"Good Roads" by Thomas Boyd tells a story of how Uncle John fought construction of the cement state highway. It would mean increased taxes and the end of privacy. Taxes had been hard enough to raise even with the help of Aunt Mary's hens:

-----He said, "Curse their state roads." ----Uncle John leaned on the fence rail which separated the barnyard from the pasture and thought: "They'll never get me to sign a petition to have that damned road come through here. If the people in town want it let them put up the money for it, and not go around trying to shove the expense off on the farmers! Saying a cement road'll improve the value of a farm! So it will, if you want to sell your farm like Cal Young does. But if a man wants to keep his farm like I want to keep mine, I can't figure how a cement road'll make the land produce more crops. Nope, if the people in the towns want these roads then let them foot the bill"-----

-----said Jess Egle-----"I calc'late it'd be a mighty good thing to have that road. I was figerin' that if it went through I'd put in a gasoline station and sell sandwiches and soft drinks to the tourists."

-----And now the old dirt road is gone, the rural quiet is gone, and old Prince and Belle are in the boneyard; but there is a new concrete road running past the house along the river; and tourists in Fords and Buicks find the countryside between the old house and the dam so picturesque that every year they stop in droves and camp



there, and leave their old cans and bottles and pasteboard plates and papers littered over the trampled grass before they proceed on their bumpy but adventurous ways. 98

The first time we heard the radio! The oldsters remember that along about 1912 to 1916. Many a time have we waited in vain hour after hour to extract one word from the static din. To all it a curse remained for some of the wives of experimenters. In "The Curse" by Paul Deresco Augsburg we get the familiar picture:

And then that glorious moment when, the aerial in place, the ground connected, the little detector adjusted, John heard real words coming over his radio. It worked! His mouth open the better to catch what was said, his eyes eagerly shining, he repeated that first ethereal sentence with all the exultation of a discoverer: "The limp leather industry is facing its brightest year." Then he pulled off the head phones and Cora tremblingly donned them.-----

-----During the crowded evening hours John would hear three and sometimes four local stations simultaneously clamoring for his attention, nor could all his assiduous tuning eliminate a single claimant. It was disconcerting, albeit exciting, to have a talk on "Domestic Life of the Missouri Mule" accompanied on the accordion by "Funiculi Funicula", on the ukulele by "Black Bottom", while Rilla Roi's soprano kept hitting the high notes with "Ave Maria" by Schubert.

Cora soon grew used to the nightly spectacle of her husband seated on her best rug surrounded by wire and tools and binding posts and tinfoil. But she never became accustomed to the unspeakable things he did.

There was the case of her curling iron, for instance. It vanished. Cora looked high and low. At last she found it among John's assortment of wires and tools and binding posts and tinfoil.

The next article to disappear from its milieu was the eggbeater: converted into a sort of drill for making small

98 Boyd, "Good Roads", Scribner's Magazine, vol. 79 (January, 1926), pp. 42-46

holes in wood.

Then the sewing machine fell victim of this fiend. He rigged up an appalling attachment for it and all one Sunday pedaled away, winding wire on a fiber core. He said he was making a choke coil, and Cora said she wished he would.

The came the night when she reached into a closet to turn on the light, encountered bare copper, and received an electric shock.

"Oh yes, I forgot to tell you," John mumbled. "I needed a switch to cut in my intermediates. I thought you wouldn't be using it."

-----"You quit thinking three months ago, when I first let you bring that crystal set into the house. You've been in a trance ever since. Why, John Cook, you've gone insane. God help you. You're crazy, and you're driving me crazy, too."

Sometime in December Walt Hutchings heard the big General Electric station in Oakland. -----The following week he sold his car and spent over two hundred dollars on a superheterodyne equitment. He purchased--if such heathenish longo has any meaning to you--nine D XA tubes, three variable condensers, four intermediate transformers, one power tube, one grid leak, a new set of batteries, four audio frequency transformers, four rheostats, an A-B-C battery eliminator, a set of fixed condensers, one core speaker, and an indoor loop aerial. John, too, was getting worse if such a thing could be possible.

Far into the night he would change wires, listen, turn a dial, listen, turn another dial, listen, change some wires, listen-----

-----"What do you care what it counds like? It ain't every day you hear two thousand miles with your naked ears."

Four nights later the Widmayers, Charlie and Beckie, dropped in for a social call. John had to wash the insulating tar from his hands, don his coat, and sit there like a condemned man discussing this and that. -----Mrs. Widmayer spied the indoor loop aerial and made some comment about radio.

"Don't even breathe that word," said Cora, not so mock-tragically as her visitor probably thought. "Poor John took ether five months ago and he's never come out of it."

"Isn't it beautiful! My dear, do you realize that there are two thousand miles of cactus and corn and mountain goats between you and that---that--- What is it, John, a soprano or one of those Aimee McPherson investigations?"

"Now we'll see what Seattle's doing tonight," said John, properly ignoring his wife.

During these months of trial Cora had had her wild moments, of course, when she considered eloping with the butcher or the man who delivered milk. But God had compassion on her, and at last she was able to tolerate the present in glad contemplation of the future. Though it did seem almost like bringing a little half orphan into the world, with John as the infant's father.

-----After all, a baby is so local-----and John was now combing the air for Australia. He did suggest that they name it Kenneth R. Cook, if it were a boy, in honor of station KRC.-----

-----It was a woman's voice, and it said: "Station B-A-B-Y, Sidney."

"Cora!" exclaimed John, turning like a flash.

"Is that-----?"

"Your son, Sidney," she nodded. "Look, John; its dear little hands."

"Why, he's singing 'Solo Meaow'," he said, entranced by the racket. "Sidney! 'Solo Meaow'!" 99

During this period when there were good crops the old folks had time and money to visit their old home towns back East in Illinois, Iowa, or even farther east. John Gilchrist wrote "Second Sunday After Easter," showing that even a short trip from home brought changes during the period when farmers were raising nothing but wheat:

I really was sorry after I did it, but, of course, I wouldn't say I was; and I wouldn't admit to anyone I did it on purpose. They ought to have know, though, that giving Jim such a black eye and bruising his face wasn't just an accident. None of them suspected me at all except Papa, and he said that he didn't think it was done by me just turning around real quick like I said to look out of

the car window, and letting my elbow go into my brother's face.

-----As it was I ought to have felt bad for hurting Jim. I might have put out his eye. When I jabbed, though, the day before, I wanted to hurt him awfully bad.-----

Mom was the one who was especially glad, because she had really planned the trip so many times, and had looked forward to it for so long that she was just running over with gladness, I guess. We felt like she did. We were going clear to Spring Green, a town thirty miles to the north, where Mother had lived when she was a little girl, before she moved away to go to normal school.-----

When one of Mom's brothers, the one down in Oklahoma, got a car, about the first model T Ford out, I think it was, he came by our place every fall on his way to Nebraska, and once in a while, he would say something about stopping in Spring Green, and going out to see the old home. "Things have changed a lot around the old home place," he would tell Mother.

One fall, uncle, from Oklahoma, wrote Mother and said that he and his wife Maimie would stop and get Mom the next week, and take her with them to Spring Green. So Mother got things ready----she would be gone for a couple days. Just at the last minute something came up.

When we got our oil money the next summer for our leases, and bought the new Rio touring car, Mother said, "Now, surely, we can make the trip."

Finally, one day Papa said we'd go. It was just two Sundays after Easter. I remember it was bright and fresh like. We started at one o'clock. "Could step on the gas," Papa said, "and make it less than an hour. But I'll make it easy on the car----I'll average about 25 miles an hour."-----

Once Mom said that the country had changed so that she couldn't recognize much of anything. What had been prairie land was now wheat fields. For miles they stretched, and we could see the leaves of the wheat all glittery in the sun when we looked towards the west. But we didn't look that way much. The sun hurt our eyes, and besides Mom said her home was near and it was on the east side of the road.



"Can't you see something that was like it used to be?" Jim asked. "We haven't gone far enough yet." Mother said. "We haven't reached the home place yet, you see. It's past the river and across a low valley like. It's past this side of Green Spring a few miles. Wait till we get to the river and then we'll see all the things I told you about."

-----The river looked awfully small and we could see the bottom clear across. We went over a white concrete bridge.

Father slowed down. "See anything familiar?" he wanted to know.

Mother did not answer. She was straining her eyes like a person does when it's dark----your eyes kind of bulge out, you know. She was trying to see some of the things she had told us about. She wanted us to see what she had remembered and had described to us.

I am pretty sure how about it. I don't believe she could see a thing she remembered. The land was laid out in wheat fields, for about a mile, on both sides. There were no buildings, and no trees, just the rolling wheat land, green in the afternoon sun. In one place I saw a gully and a pile of stones, and the stump of a tree, I thought. I think that was where Mother's home was.

Still Jim kept on asking questions and Mom couldn't answer. Her eyes were sad, and there were tears.

"Where's the house and the orchard, Mom?" Jim asked. "Don't ask so many questions," I whispered.

He was getting ready to ask another question, and I thought he would make Mom feel worse, so I turned real quick like in the seat, holding my arm and elbow stiff, and jabbed my elbow right into his eye, and then with my other hand when his eyes were closed, I hit him hard on the check.---

At the edge of town Mother said, "Don't stop."

We drove up one street and down another. Mom saw nothing she remembered except an old church building, now used for a store house for hay and grain.

"Drive home another way," Mother said softly. She was white and silent most of the way home. 100

"The Homecoming of Colonel Hucks," by William Allen White, is known and loved by all Kansans. It was in the Eighth Grade Classics which for years were used in the Kansas schools.

100. Gilchrist, "Second Sunday After Easter" Kansas Magazine (1934) P. 53-56.

It was their wont, in these latter days, to sit in the silent house, whence the children had gone out to try issue with the world, and of evenings to talk of the old faces and of the old places, in the home of their youth. Theirs had been a pinched and busy life. They had never returned to visit their old Ohio home. The Colonel's father and mother were gone. His wife's relatives were not there. Yet each felt the longing to go back.---Their children had been brought up to believe that the place was little less than heaven.----Last year, Providence blessed the Huckses with plenty. It was the woman who revived the friendship of youth in her husband's cousin, who lived in the old township in Ohio. It was Mrs. Hucks who secured from that cousin an invitation to spend a few weeks in the Ohio homestead----Colonel Hucks needed no persuasion to take the trip.----

As Mrs. Hucks "did up" the breakfast dishes---she began to feel that the old house would be lonesome without her----she petted the furniture as she "set it to rights", ----every bit of furniture brought up its separate recollection and there was a hatchet-scarred chair in the kitchen which had come with her in the wagon from Ohio.----Her husband was puttering around the barnyard----repeating for the twentieth time, the instructions to a neighbor about the care of the stock----

-----In the cars, Colonel Hucks found himself leaning across the aisle, bragging mildly about Kansas, for the benefit of a traveling man from Cincinnati.-----As they neared the old familiar places the Colonel began to comment-----It seemed to him that the creek which ran through the lot was dry and ugly----He remembered it as a huge boulder, and he had told his children wonderful tales about its great size----it had worn away one-half in thirty years.-----

"Father, I've been lookin' out the window, and I see they've had such a dreadful drouth here. See that grass there, it's as short and dry---and the ground looks burneder and crackeder than it does in Kansas."-----

The next day while the Huckses were being shown around the place by the cousins, their observations were rather belittling.

"Lookie there, Mother, they've got a new mill----smaller'n the old mill, too."

To which his cousin responded, "Bill Hucks, what's got into you, anyway! That's the same old mill, where me

and you used to steal pigeons."----

When the two Kansas people were alone that night, the Colonel asked: "Don't it seem kind of dwarfed here---to what you expected it would be? Seems to me like it's all shriveled, and worn out and old. ---The hills I've thought of as young mountains don't seem to be so big as our bluff back--back home."----

Kansas was "home" to them now. For thirty years the struggling couple on the prairie had kept the phrase "back home" sacred to Ohio. Each felt a thrill at the household blasphemy, and both were glad that the Colonel had said "back home", and that it meant Kansas.-----After that first day, Colonel Hucks did not restrain his bragging about Kansas----Mrs. Hucks caught herself saying to her hostess, "What small ears of corn you raise here!"--

Homeward bound! They were on the train now going back to Kansas. Mrs. Hucks said to her husband: "How do you suppose they live here in this country anyway, Father? Don't any one here seem to own any of the land joinin' them, and they'd no more think of puttin' in water tanks and windmills around their farms than they'd think of flyin'. I wish Mary could come out and see my new kitchen sink with the hot and cold water in it.---- But they are so unprogressive here, now-a-days."---

"Excuse me, ma'am, but what part of Kansas are you from?"----

It seemed like a meeting with a dear relative. The rest of the journey to Kansas City was a hallelujah chorus, wherein the Colonel sang a powerful and telling bass. 101

The Plains States' people have always hated the pretender and the sham. Uncle Henry in "One Hundred Per Cent" does not let the Honorable J. O. Coughlin get away with it, even though he must have felt it a shame to expose the clay feet of an idol to a youthful worshipper. Leo Jack writes of a Nebraska small town's Fourth of

101. White, "The Homecoming of Colonel Hucks". Eighth Grade Classics, PP. 312-326.



July. The story is related by Uncle Henry's nephew.

Uncle Henry flicked the lines over the black mare, and shifted his quid of Union Leader. "What'd you think of the speechifying at the Crossin'?" As a dutiful fifteen-year-old would I said it was good.-----

-----Now it was sundown and Uncle Henry and I were on our way home.-----The chief speaker was the Honourable J. O. Coughlin, our Congressman, and if he didn't twist the British lion's tail and pull all the feathers out of the Austrian eagle-----He gave the French hell for not paying their war debt, and the crowd said he ought to know, for he was there in '18.-----While the story was being related I heard Uncle Henry swearing under his breath and I thought maybe a mosquito had bitten him.-----

---As I studied the speaker I couldn't help thinking that he would be a dangerous man in a fight, for he was big and heavy, and he looked strong enough to put an awful push behind a bayonet. Then, too, he had an air of embattled virtue which indicated that when he was roused he could be terrible. It was a mighty good thing for our district that we had such a man to protect the public interests. And, yet he had an ingratiating way; tall, with a fair, full face, and bright trusting blue eyes, and a great handshake. He dressed very well.

-----The mayor had introduced Coughlin as a veteran of many battles, who had gone into politics to purify them. I didn't see any medals on him, but he was probably modest and left them at home.-----I'd made up my mind that on our way home I'd quiz Uncle Henry about those battles.

Uncle Henry is thin-faced, and always clean shaved. He has bright grey eyes and a retiring way. He is five feet nine, and he limps a little when he walks. He got a shrapnel bullet in his left foot at the Fond des Meszeires and didn't go to the hospital.

-----"Fourth of July speeches don't mean nothin', kid," he observed. "The politicians--and that goes for Coolidge and Coughlin, and ninety-nine per cent of the men holding offices that they got by votes----they don't care a rap for the common people, or the soldiers either, spite of all they talk about battles, and brave boys, and all that."102



The nephew is sure the people appreciate the soldiers since Mr. Coughlin has such a good job. Then Uncle Henry tells the story of his bridge and a cannoneer by the name of "Spicks" or "Sticks." "Spicks" was never there for a battle, always became lost before the big event came off.

In the middle of the last night when we were getting close to the front, and we could hear the guns booming and see the red flashes on the sky-line, it began to rain cats and dogs, and what with all the mud and confusion, and the trampling, and the troops jammed up in the cross roads, and the black darkness, "Sticks" or "Wicks" lost his way, and went somewhere else. Damned if we didn't have to go into action without him.

-----You'd think, now, wouldn't you, that a rabid patriot who was just yearning to kill him a few Germans would have found his way up to the front, and rejoined his regiment in the course of twenty-six consecutive days of hard fighting?-----We ran right into "Ticks" or "Spicks," and there were tears in his big blue eyes as he told First Lieutenant Finnegan, who happened to be our commanding officer because the captain had been killed by a shell, how hard a time he'd had away from the battery, and gee, couldn't he have something to eat? He was damn near starved." 103

Then the brigade was sent to Verdun. Every night they hiked thirty miles, through rain. On the morning of September 23, when they lined up for mess there was no "Sticks" in the kitchen. There was continuous fighting from September 26 to November 11th.

When they brought us out at last we could just totter, and that was all. Clothes in rags, equipment busted, guns blown up. Seventy-five per cent of the old horses were dead, seventy-two per cent of the men killed, wounded, or gassed. Nobody laughed, or joked, or talked. They just walked along glassy-eyed. When it was time to rest, they rested, and when the guides said 'go' they got up passively, and went. Thirty-nine days in the Meuse-Argonne without a break. Ask anybody that was there.-----

After a week or two we bobbed down into the neighborhood of Neuville-sur Orne, and damned if we

didn't walk right on Private "Sticks." And, believe it or not, he got lost on that hike to Verdun. He smiled a wan smile when they took him to the guard house. He said it was tough treatment for a poor boy who was trying to do his duty, and had had misfortunes.-----

-----When we finally came back to America, old Finnegan said, "Turn the blankety-blank son of a skunk loose, and let him go!" So "Sticks" chirked up immediately. I heard he worked them for an honorable discharge.

"Gee," I said, "that fellow was a dirty yellow coward.-----" "What made you think of him, Uncle Henry?" "O, I saw him---at the Crossin'!" "You did?" I cried. "Who is he?"

-----"Why our honourable Congressman, J. O. Coughlin." 104

During this period not many had the courage to come out and take the side of the mortgagee, as the Populists had given him a black eye. Octave Thanet in "The Face of Failure" tells the story of Nelson Forrest, a sentimental and easy fellow, who had helped his neighbor by lending him money on a mortgage, the payment of which was long past due. Nelson was being foreclosed and his neighbor refused to make any effort to raise the money to pay off this mortgage. Nelson hated to insist on payment or in any way to hurt a friend.

At a carnival Nelson met a Miss Brown, who told him her life story of hardship and struggle; then he told his story:

-----"I've farmed in Kansas, and in Nebraska, in Dakota, and in Iowa. I was willing to go wherever the land promised. It always seemed like I was going to succeed, but somehow I never did. The world ain't fixed right for the workers, I take it. A man who has spent about thirty years in hard honest toil oughtn't to be staring ruin in the face like I am today.----- Sometimes I think it's the world that's wrong and sometimes I think it's me."

Miss Brown's reply came in crisp and assured accents.

"Seems to me in this last case the one most to blame is neither you nor the world at large but this man Richards who is asking you to pay for his farm. And I notice you don't seem to consider your creditor in this business. How do you know she doesn't need the money?"

The reader is aware that Miss Brown is the creditor as she has secured the mortgage as part of an estate.

"Look at me, for instance, I'm in some financial difficulty myself. I have a mortgage for two thousand dollars and that mortgage for which good value was given, mind you--falls due this month. I want the money. I want it bad. I have a chance to put my money into stock at the factory. I know all about the investment. I haven't worked there all these years and not known how the business stands. It is a chance to make a fortune. I ain't likely to have another like it." 105

In East Texas orthodox religion and strict morality were just as strong as they were in North Texas. "The Stoic" by Chester T. Crowell tells of a small boy's wonder and enlightenment in meeting outsiders.

It was during the never-to-be-forgotten September when my father promised me long trousers for Christmas that Wallace Hutchins came to our community, bringing with him his beautiful wife and their little girl, five years of age. They were the only total strangers who established a home there during my lifetime. Any others who came had kin-folk in the community. It was not a town, but a cross-road, marked by a general store, a cotton-gin, several churches, and a side-track for freight. People in the country referred to this place as "the Corners". The farmers lived in

105 Thanet, "The Face of Failure," Stories of a Western Town,  
p. 81

unpainted, pine-board shacks, which looked as drab and discouraged as their corn crops during dry weather.-----

Wallace Hutchins and his partner, Paul Davidson, came to this community to drill for oil. The small boy tells the story.

-----My eyes opened wide with astonishment as these men set up large, comfortable tents, oil-cooking-stoves, neat beds, mirrors, and little stands on which their toilet articles were displayed. They came one morning, and early in the afternoon they were not only established but provisioned from the general store. Moreover, they paid cash. I had never seen any one do that before. Cash was available only once a year when the cotton was sold.

A few days after they had moved in Mr. Hutchins called to the boy:

"Sonny, can you get a quart of fresh milk for the little girl?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," I replied, confident that I could hold out that much when I milked three cows. At any rate, I was determined to take a chance, for he was a demigod, and the little girl in her pretty, clean clothes, an angel. He stepped into the tent and reappeared with a glass bottle, the first I had ever seen.

-----The glass bottle was my ticket of admission to a new world twice a day.-----

-----Mrs. Hutchins used the tea leaves or coffee grounds only once, then threw them away. She wore a house dress while cooking, but changed to her party dress before serving the food. The little girl laughed a great deal and seldom cried. One day she asked her father to buy her a Shetland pony, and the very next morning he telegraphed for it. When she climbed on his knee, he didn't tell her to go away because he was tired. He changed clothes when he came home in the evening and wore a coat at the table.-----His khaki working clothes were washed regularly and always looked clean. He didn't seem to have any old clothes to work in. When he came home from the derricks in the evening he took a bath and even washed his head. Every morning he shaved. Instead of wasting hours at these tasks, he con-



sumed only a few minutes.-----

Observing all this made me think of my aged grandfather, who lived with us. He always put on an old smoking-jacket with a velvet collar when he came to supper.

"We are poor," he said, "but not white trash. When I was a young man in New Orleans, my boy, I dressed for dinner."

But to return to the Hutchins household, another innovation I encountered was the kiss. Mrs. Hutchins would often kiss her husband without any excuse, and neither seemed embarrassed by my presence.

One day a truck thundered into camp carrying the Shetland pony. With it came a collie dog. I begged permission to feed the pony, and Mr. Hutchins not only granted permission, but insisted on paying me one dollar a week. It was like accepting wages to attend the circus.-----

The preacher of "The Corners" called.

One evening while I was leading the pony up and down in front of the tent, and the little girl, holding tight to the saddle, was squealing with delight, Preacher Jackson called.

-----His black deep-set eyes burned with such intensity that one expected him to speak passionately. Instead, his voice was deep and calm. He was tall, gaunt, and determined. Saving sinners was only the least part of the task he had set for himself. He purposed also to prevent sin.

"Are you a member of any church?" he asked Mr. Hutchins.

"No," was the prompt reply. Mr. Hutchins was watching the little girl.

"I am the Reverend Mr. Jackson. We shall be pleased to receive you."

"Yes, sir. Thank you." Mr. Hutchins replied too promptly.

Preacher Jackson glanced at the pony, and beyond it, saw a group of workmen sitting around a table playing cards. They were in front of a tent and had large lanterns hanging over the table.

"Are those men playing cards?" he demanded.

"They are."

"That will have to stop." Preacher Jackson started

toward the table. Mr. Hutchins placed his hands to his mouth and called: "Look out, boys! He may upset the table. If he bothers you, throw him into the creek."

Preacher Jackson returned and faced Mr. Hutchins. "You tolerate that in the sight of your innocent child?" he asked, pointing at the card game.-----  
-----"We shall pray for you Wednesday evening," Preacher Jackson announced.

Children were not required to attend Wednesday prayer meeting, but I heard about it Thursday morning. On my way to the camp to deliver the milk I met Mrs. Hobbs. She was talking to herself as was her custom, and when I appeared she merely raised her voice.

"And you delivering them milk," she said, "next we'll be praying for you."

My grandfather called Mrs. Hobbs the town-crier because she spread so much news, but at that time I didn't know what a town-crier was. I supposed he referred to her habit of attending all funerals for miles around and weeping noisily. Also, she had a peculiar voice, and when she talked about God it seemed to me there was sort of a sob barely controlled.

When I delivered the milk Mr. Hutchins was in high humor as usual.

"Well, sonny, did they pray for me?" he asked. I had to smile, because he was so jolly and handsome and unafraid.

"Yes, sir," I said, "I'm awful sorry."

"Sorry?" He was astonished. I explained what it meant.

"So you think my social standing is just about ruined?"

"I like you," I managed to say.

"Were none of your family ever prayed for?"

The question was asked as a joke, but it exposed the family skeleton.

"Grandfather was," I answered. "He made some wine."

When I reached home I asked grandfather if he thought it was all right for me to deliver milk to Mr. Hutchins.

"What do you think?" he demanded sternly.

"I don't see any harm in it." I tried to catch a glimpse of my father and mother at the same time.

"Then deliver it," he shouted. "The sorriest human on earth is a coward. You've got good blood in your veins, boy, if this sand hasn't clogged it. I'm not afraid of death, so you ought not to be afraid to deliver milk."

One evening when the boy went to deliver milk he was rewarded with a view of the constable and his enormous leather pistol-holster, which he wore over his stomach instead of on his hip. The figure he presented was absurd, but if you will go through the motions of drawing your pistol, first from the hip and then from the belt buckle, you will at once see that the constable's holster occupied a decidedly strategic position. Preacher Jackson had sent the constable to stop card-playing. -----Playing cards in a public place was, and still is, a misdemeanor under Texas law, even though the game were solitaire.

-----The constable seemed glad not to have caught them. He advised that future games be played in the tents, which had the status of private houses and could not be invaded unless the men were gambling.-----

-----When I delivered the milk next morning Mr. Davidson came to the back door and said: "We won't need any more, sonny. The two little girls are dead." I dropped the bottle. "It was that gas stove," he explained very calmly. "It went out. When Wally came home about eleven o'clock they were dead."-----

Paul Davidson sought to console his friend Wally, but Wally showed very little emotion concerning the sudden death of his loved ones.

"There's a finality about death, Paul, which

is beyond grief. I know their lives have been as near untouched by trouble as is humanly possible. Who knows that it could always have been so? The child's five and a half years are as perfect as the whitest diamond.-----I take this like the rest of life, Paul, standing up. The little one is dead, and that's an end without worry. My wife and I could, I think, have grown old together gracefully; but if that is not to be, then I have nothing to regret in our relations. We painted a masterpiece, and now it is ours forever, beyond the danger of future marring. We could not have done better in a century than we have done in seven years."

"You are a good Stoic, Wally," Mr. Davidson said.

Again the boy takes up the story.

-----Before I could say anything, he walked away to meet Preacher Jackson, who was coming toward the tent. I did not hear their first words, but Mr. Davidson was evidently trying to detain him and not succeeding. As they came nearer I heard Preacher Jackson say:

"It is the hour of their affliction that men turn to-----"

"I'll go in and tell him you are here," Mr. Davidson interrupted.

Inside the tent he said:

"Better let him come in, Wally. He wants to console you. Better have it over with. Let's don't have any trouble at a time like this."

"He doesn't want to console me," Mr. Hutchins replied. "He wants to tell me I brought this on myself." -

-----"But, Paul, I want them to know there are men who don't break down. I want them to know there is a religion with no whine in it!!" 106

This period had been a long uphill pull with many a "high middle". (In Texas a high middle is a place in the road where the ruts wear so deeply that the wagon wheels spin but the wagon itself remains stationery. A new road must be started.) It seemed to

106. Crowell, "The Stoic," Century Magazine, vol. 108 (May, 1924), pp. 92-100.



end by coming out on a level plateau. It would be easy pulling from now on. People were feeling satisfied with themselves and their accomplishments. The older generation and the geography of the plains had done much to further this feeling. Broadness in religion, faith in equality, and belief in fair dealing and in the free expansion of soul and mind were being fostered instead of being hindered. The Plains States were becoming more than ever like one big state. The good roads, the newspapers, the radio, and the farm organizations all had had a part in this.

The younger generation had taken much credit for this progress because it came in their time. But much of the credit was due to the older generation. Again the Plains States spirit became more like that of pioneer times; in neighborliness and in the feeling of equality with their own plains people. During this period there had been times when there was a drawing away from their own, because of political, religious, and racial beliefs. But it was over and this section of the country seemed ashamed that such division had ever been. Even world peace seemed to be on its way. The poor were still with us but they were not suffering. The local community gladly cared for its own. A faint glow of prosperity was lighting up the sky and things looked hopeful. All seemed well. Ahead the plateau looked level and easy going.

## CHAPTER IV

## PROSPERITY AND DEPRESSION

1925 - 1938

Charles and Mary Beard in their recent America in Midpassage have 107 called the beginning of this period "The Golden Glow." War had been renounced and the United States was entering upon an endless age of peace. All was fair and good. Coolidge was president, a thrifty, prudent fellow who was sure to bring prosperity and wealth to the nation. The "Golden Glow" soon grew dim over the Plains States as farm produce prices went very low. But crops and credit were good and the farmer, merchant, and professional man began to invest. The farmer bought land, houses, implements, paying just enough down to gain possession; never paying outright for anything. Nothing, it seemed, was clear of a mortgage. High power salesmen were being recruited and trained to sell, sell, sell. Everything seemed rosy and the plains farmer bought, bought, bought with no thought of the future.

The big crash in the stock market came in the fall of 1929. Farm prices had been low, but now the prices of agricultural commodities declined to almost nothing. Wheat was selling for

107 Beard, America in Midpassage, p. 3

twenty-five cents a bushel. Farmers used corn for fuel instead of buying coal. Foreclosures started, farm machinery was repossessed, and taxes went unpaid. Farmers were on the march to prevent foreclosure sales. Crops were poor as a great drought hit the Plains States. They had no irrigation systems as yet although a great bed of underflow water lay below much of this section. Farm commodity prices were below a living standard and farmers were demanding that President Hoover do something. Another calamity struck this section--the dust storm. Land was devastated, buildings and farm machinery were covered over, and there was nothing but heaps of dust, not a sign of vegetation in some parts of the Plains States. Poverty was extreme on many farms.

Then bank failures began taking the savings of the farmer. The life savings of old folks who had felt secure in their old age were gone and they were left destitute with all earning power gone.

Entertainment and worthy use of leisure time became a vicarious affair. The radio, the movies, and books supplied the people, whose ancestors had made history, with an unreal, artificial, trumped up sort of thrill which as time passed had to be a hair raiser to give the desired effect.

Church attendance fell off and the local ministers lamented. A much better minister or lecturer could be heard by a twist of the dial than any small community church-going crowd could afford to hire. Books dealing with the abnormal, the sub-normal, and

the horrendous, flooded the best seller market. Even Dodge City, the cow-boy capital, had to import rodeos to give its citizens a taste of the old West.

Dust storms and big tractors were sending thousands of migrants to other states to seek a living. John Steinbeck wrote Grapes of Wrath, a book which stirred the country. The Joads, the family from Oklahoma, were shockingly unrefined and spoke with the racy vulgarity of earthly people, but they were not shiftless or degenerate. They were sound of mind, body, and heart--good plains folks left high and dry by the changing times.

Texas held her Centennial in 1936 at Dallas. Henderson Fagen, a Dallas newspaperman wrote in June of that year:

Four days of riding through dusty sagebrush country in August made Gen. Phil Sheridan declare that if he owned Texas and hell he would rent out Texas and live in hell. For two generations Texans have resented this appraisal: but now they are ready to answer the general. 108

Then Fagen went on to laud his state: it crops, its gridiron poweress, its liberalism in art, literature, and journalism. But in the end he admitted that in formal education the state was somewhat strict on what was taught in its schools. In crime he said that with reference to population Dallas had three and one-half times as many slayings as Chicago and seven times as many as New York.

Texas recently tried to get the legislature to vote \$8000.00 to restore the notorious Jersey Lily Saloon that in early times

108 Fagen, "Texas Comes of Age," American Mercury (June, 1936), p.213



had been run by Roy Bean. But a storm of protests was raised by the W. C. T. U. women, who declared that better use could be made of the money than to such a degrading purpose.

Many stories are told of Roy Bean, who was not only the proprietor of the saloon but was the self-appointed administrator of what his sign called "Law West of the Pecos". One story has gone around the globe. An Irish man had killed a Chinese, red-handed, but the murderer's friends threatened to wreck Bean's shanty saloon if the fellow came to justice. Bean looked through his dog-eared law books, then announced, "Gentlemen, I find the law very explicit about murdering your fellowman but there is nothing here about killing a Chinaman. Case dismissed."

Once in holding an inquest over a man who had been found dead "Judge" Bean found he had a gun and forty dollars.--So he fined the dead man forty dollars for carrying a concealed weapon. Bean pocketed all the fines he collected, justifying his action on the grounds that his court had to be self-sustaining. Such picturesque characters were not appreciated yet by the W. C. T. U. So Dallas did not get its \$8000.00 to honor his memory.

There was a friend who came to the aid of the Plains States in their dire need. It was the government. The aid came in the form of seed loans, and soil conservation and rehabilitation funds. In September, 1932, President Roosevelt in a speech at Topeka, Kansas, expounded the very principles of crop control which were soon to be written in the terms of the Agricultural Adjustment Act. Most

farmers soon began to make a fair living even though acreage was cut. They began to diversify crops, raise poultry for market, and sell more dairy products. Beyond making a living there was not much more to farming. Farm buildings went unpainted and unrepaired. The country looked far from prosperous. But it was surprising how well taxes were being paid up. The love of his land led the farmer to use his government check to pay his taxes even though other debts were unpaid. The farmers were "getting along" on the plains, except during the years when the dust storms took all crops. The country was scattered with vacant rundown houses. Land owners didn't want tenants. They wanted the entire government check for their own use. Oil royalties and leases, too, were a source of income to the Plains States.

The Plains States were being recognized in a political way. Governor Alfred M. Landon of Kansas was chosen in 1936 to run for President of the United States. Alfred Landon had escaped the Democratic landslide in his own state and Hearst gave him wide publicity as "the strong, silent man of Kansas" and as the governor "who balanced his budget". John ("Cactus Jack") Garner of Texas was chosen to become Vice-President of the nation. So honors came to the Plains.

In the short story development it was a time of strong realism without too much sentimentality. Many of the stories struck beneath the environment and probed into the mind that helped make the envi-

ronment. The individuality of the descendant of the pioneer is stressed more now than the heroic condition of the pioneer. Henry Seidel Canby says in an article in the July, 1923, Century Magazine (after tracing the stages in national literature) that in the present stage we grow weary of the American who is put into fiction to illustrate something which the writer thinks is the truth about the region.

The dust storm has been used as subject for the short story of the plains, probably because nothing else had ever made such an impression on the minds and nerves of the populace. The nervous tension brought on by dusty days and nights can not be imagined unless one has gone through it. There was the everlasting wind with its dust-laden, penetrating breath seeking out every crevice and crack until it seemed to seep into the very souls of the plains people. Everyone was grim, tense, and edgy. Teachers reported that children did not learn but seemed to be waiting for something to happen, and when a rap was heard at the door the expression on the faces was one of terror and apprehension. Another dust storm! Their parents had come to take them home. How could anyone's mind be receptive during such times? Yet jokes came from this catastrophe--crude ones, but jokes created by the victims. John Herrmann seems to have made a collection of them in his story "Two Days from the South" in Scribner's Magazine of May, 1936. It was concerning the Jasper family living near Dodge City, Kansas.

Phillip Jasper rubbed sleep out of his eyes and stretched, disturbing his wife with his upraised left elbow--"No dust," Phillips said.

"The first time in three weeks we've seen the day break like that," his wife said-----109

Later when Caroline had gotten the older children up and given them their breakfast, she went to look at the baby sleeping near her bed in the crib as he was coughing lightly even though he went on sleeping. Then was a discussion as to whether the children should go to school. They had not been there for three weeks. As there was no dust that day, Phillip's thoughts turned to plowing, harrowing, sowing, and harvest.

These activities were so often filled with drudgery and the hardest, most driving kind of work and so often followed by disappointment, due to drought, hail, wind, and flood, and the prices on the market.

"It would be good to get into gear again,"

Phillip thought, and went into the barn. He threw down some government-relief corn fodder, careful not to overdo it. The cow was very thin and poor but he must watch carefully each corn-stock. This morning he fed the cow a portion of meal and noticed how the dust had sifted into the covered barrel and changed the gray-white stuff almost black. 110

Jack, the oldest boy, came to the barn to tell Phillip one of Grandpa's latest dust stories. Grandpa had told him that one of his chickens had eaten so much dust that it had laid an egg full of dust.

"Don't believe everything your grandpa tells you. That couldn't be, Jack.-----That was just one of Grandpa's darn dust-storm jokes. I get al-

109 Herrmann, "Two Days from the South," Scribner's Magazine, (May, 1936)

110 Ibid.



mighty tired of hearing his darn jokes." 111

It was decided that the children might go to school.

"It's fun at school when they's a storm," Jack said. "Even if it did storm I could find my way home. I wouldn't care how hard it stormed. I wouldn't care if it was black as anything. I could find my way home." 112

Little Freddie and the other brother younger than Jack said they could, too.

"Well now. What a family I've got! They could find their way home from school, a mile away, in a storm like yesterday's. Why a bloodhound couldn't make its way through one of those howlers. The dust makes it so you can't draw a civilized breath of air into your lungs hardly, and your eyes smarting like you'd rubbed them with cactus. If any of you ever got caught in a storm in that school house, you would stay right there wouldn't you? Until somebody came for you, wouldn't you? Remember what I said, stay until somebody calls for you." 113

After the four children start for school, Caroline fed the baby.

He coughed some but nothing like the day before when dust sifted in around the windows in spite of the strips of paper pasted on the cracks.----Caroline looked down at him, thinking of the dreaded dust pneumonia that had filled the hospitals and which the papers said was taking a life a day in Garden City. Her children must not get sick. It would be better to clear out of the country. Leave the farm and go east, as many of the landless tenant neighbors were doing and as those more favored wealthy folks were also doing. 114

But when Caroline suggested that they all get in the truck and go to Missouri, Phillip said:

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.

"We couldn't. We'd be off'n relief. We'd lose the rest of our steers and we couldn't leave here with the government farm loan. We ain't got a cent of ready cash, Ma. We got to stick it out." 115

Food for the cattle as well as food for the humans was scarce;

"Why they asked me twenty-eight a ton for alfalfa over to Dodge. They wanted fifty cents a hundred weight for ground thistle."

Caroline said, "If you spray molasses on that thistle they say it makes pretty good feed."

"If I had any molasses I'd eat it myself," Philip said. 116

Caroline gives her opinion of government aid:

"If the government just kept giving this and giving that without stopping to give it much thought, pretty soon the people in the government, they'd be having to go down into their own pockets if they wanted to keep it up, and they ain't anybody wants to go down into their own pockets, is there?---- Only like pa says we've been feeding the country a long time and now we need a little feed ourselves. It's just like when they told us to raise more wheat during the war. We broke all that ground and now we don't get a price for it. And if we hadn't never of broke that ground they wouldn't be these dust storms. This ground God put here to grow grass to graze cattle on. You plow it up and when it dries out is blows away."

Grandpa Jasper drove over to see his kin folks and began to complain and criticize because the children had been allowed to go to school. You never could tell what would happen:

"Two days from the south, then it comes from the north, this time of year. I've been watching ever since Dodge was the end of the railroad going west and sure as I'm standing here this breeze'll veer around north and if it does it'll blow.----

115 Ibid.

116 Ibid.

Back in '83 or somewhere along in there, we had as nice a day as ever you see, and sudden, like a bang it come down out of the north and I had a stable it blew down across your place here, down into this creek bottom by the bend.-----" 117

Phillip tried to get the old man's mind off of what might happen that afternoon by these comforting words:

"This is 1935 now and the government's reducing everything, even the wind. They reduced me from 200 head of stock to six. Don't you worry none, Pa." 118

The stock of stories Grandpa could tell about dust storms seemed to take in all that were ever told during this period.

"Say, Son, old Ken Eining, he's a card. He was sitting in his house in the storm the other day and the dust was just a pouring into the key hole of his door. It came in there so fast and piled up there so high it was about three feet and just a tearing in. By Gosh, he had to open up a window to shovel that there dust out, it was coming in the keyhole so darn fast.----

-----"Did you hear about that tribe of Indians down in Oklahoma? The whole darn tribe committed suicide. They heard the government was going to give Kansas back to the Indians.-----"

"----A friend of mine over to Dodge was driving home in that bad storm last week. He see a man's hat lying on the ground and he goes over to pick it up. It was a fair to middling hat.--He picks up the hat. Well, darned if there wasn't a man's head under it. He says 'Say, did the dust bury you that deep? It ain't safe walking through these dust storms. Come along with me. I see you're headed the same way. I'll give you a lift'. Then the man, the man who was buried in the dust there, he says, 'Oh, never mind, I'm headed for Dodge, too, only I don't need no lift, I'm on horseback.'" 119

The description of the storm is familiar to Plains States people. Phillip, now in the field and absorbed in his work, did not

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid.



notice the change in the sky until the very stillness called his attention to it.

There was a complete silence and not the slightest sign of a breeze. And the sky to the south, as he faced it, though still blue and clear, was of a peculiar blue, bright but with no glare. It was the blue of a cheap colored calendar print and seemed to cover the earth like a metal dome, almost as though the sky were not a sky at all but a solid rounded, blue-granite roasting-pan lid,---He looked to the north. It seemed impossible, but there, half way between himself and his farmhouse, rose a straight black wall of black dust,---Looking up, he saw it black and terrible, from a quarter to a half mile high. Clouds of black rolled and writhed, turned and twisted, on the oncoming edge of this horrible dust cloud,---Then it was night. It was so black within that cloud of dust that he could not see the wrench in his hand, less than two feet from his eyes. 120

Phillip thought of his children and the neighbors' children but was sure they were safe in the school house. He held onto the wheel of the tractor, but it was cold now and he could hardly breathe; so he decided to find his truck and wet a rag to put over his mouth. He was sure by following a furrow he could locate it. But the truck was not there.

Then Phillip felt unreasoning fear come over him---His right knee hit a small cactus---He jerked the knee back quickly. Lost balance and fell---The monkey wrench bumped a rubber tire as he fell. 121

Finally, after waiting about two hours, Phillip could see five or six feet ahead of the truck with the headlights burning, and after a long slow trip he arrived home to find everyone in a

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid.



great state of excitement. Jack wasn't home! At the first sign of a storm the teacher had sent the children home. Jack had quarreled with Mary and had cut across fields to come home.

Through the thick haze of dust in the room the children looked gray and shadowlike, the gritty dust had taken all color from their hair and faces. He heard the baby cough a strained, painful, choking sort of cough. The lamplight, through the fog of dust, was indistinct and made familiar objects in the room seem strange and unreal. 122

Grandfather, Jasper, and Phillips with water soaked towels over their faces went to look for Jack, calling as they went. A distant answer came from Jack where he had fallen over the creek bank and was half buried in the dust and soft sand. With the help of two towels they rescued him. After Jack had had a drink of cold water, Grandpa coughed again and reached for the water bottle:

"A fellow in Dodge told me the only thing to do in one of these howlers is to lay down in the bottom of the water tank and breathe through one of them soda-fountain straws." 123

In the Kansas Magazine of 1936, Katherine Kilmer Miller wrote "Dust unto Dust," a story without the light of Grandpa's stories to offset the gloom. It is about the funeral of an old friend of the family attended by the daughter, who is at home on a visit.

The bleak country church shook in the April wind. The air inside was heavy with the scent of flowers ----outside, gray with dust.

A grim little populace had gathered--too grim almost to express the sympathy requisite to the funeral of one of the founders of the community. They were too

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

They were too tired and beaten--gray like the day.---

But one girl was fresh, and modishly dressed. She looked as if she were living a life, not just existing on near-dead hopes. She sat alone and looked about her a bit pityingly. But after all, she reflected with a grimace, she was one of these farm women. Perhaps soon she would be back among them in the little western Kansas town, growing stouter and unlovelier each year--vegetating to the point when eating became the major pleasure of her life, as it was now of theirs.-----

She remembered when many of them had been younger and more hopeful. Life--economic life--haddn't been so cruel then to anybody, somehow. She remembered when the church had been full every Sunday of powdered, perfumed women, and uncomfortably suited men. It wasn't so many years ago that she had sat in this same seat alone with her father, after her mother had stopped going to church. She'd been proud to sit with him and represent the family. He always cocked his head slightly to incline his good ear toward the minister, she knew; but it did add a little intimacy to their cooperative worship.

They always sat just behind Mr. Howard--Mr. Howard, who was lying dead in the ante-room right now, waiting to be wheeled in, preached over, and buried. Her parents were both feeble now, and she represented the family indeed at the funeral of their old fellow-townsmen. He'd been a sort of godfather to her, and when she heard of his death she'd been sad, but glad she was home over the week-end and could go to his funeral.

He had been crippled by paralysis but he disregarded his withered hand and shriveled leg, and others forgot them too. He was bank president, leader of the local lodge, promoter of civic enterprises.

The girl wanted to sob--the scent of the flowers stifled her and her throat ached--but somehow, she felt that the funeral was too big for her tears. It wasn't just a man dead--it was the hopes and ambitions of a generation that were being buried. Queer, she thought, what living away from home does for one. It was epochal to her, and part of the day's events to them.

They'd lived through too many years of aching, grilling poverty to become young again, even if fortune should smile. She searched the stoic faces about her.-----

Suddenly, as she sat and watched, the winds changed. Clinging puffs of dust rolled into lines over the plowed fields, to be lifted and carried away as clouds. Then came the storm with a heavy wind from western prairies, beating like sleet, with fine gravel and smooth dust.

The girl was alarmed. But the preacher continued to declaim, and his listeners remained grave and unhurried, save for occasional glances toward the windows.-----

Then the droning voices of the minister died away. Outside was blackness. The undertaker arose and announced that the congregation would remain in the church until the storm was over.

After an hour had passed, and then another hour, the storm quieted, and the coffin with its dusty flowers was wheeled slowly outside, leaving tracks behind it in the dust, as though a child's wagon had passed down the aisle. 124

Two other stories of dust storms published in the Kansas Magazine were "Grip of the Dust" 125 by Willard Mayberry and "The Stay-at-Homes" 126 by Pauline Grey.

The drouth began in 1934 and in some sections of the plains states there has not been a good crop year since. Mary Frances McKinney in an article in the Kansas Magazine for 1935 describes what happened throughout this section.

Corn burned in tassel stage.---Everyone began hauling water in June. Three miles to the river, four miles to Eagle creek. You had to

- 124 Miller, "Dust Unto Dust," Kansas Magazine (1936), pp. 61-62
- 125 Mayberry, "Grip of the Dust," Kansas Magazine (1934), pp. 17-19
- 126 Grey, "Stay-at-Homes," Kansas Magazine (1936), pp. 58-60



start early or several teams would be there ahead of you.-----

There is terrible monotony about any drouth. Day after day is the same. The sun comes up hot. The 1934 drouth was just like all others in these respects. One thing was different. One afternoon the wind from the south was hot. About four o'clock it was hotter and faster. Till about three o'clock the next morning that wind roared.-----Well, this wind felt as though it was coming off a blazing prairie.

Town folks suffered of course. In Emporia the water situation was so serious they asked folks to cut out a few baths. Every farm you passed you were apt to see bed springs on the front porch or side yard.

Nineteen thirty-four was the first full year under the A. A. A. -----The New Deal offered a little cash compensation. And brother, that helped.----- With one stroke in 1934 He wiped out the entire surplus. 127

R. Ross Annett wrote a story of drouth and dust storm in this region, which tells with humor and pathos the plight of the farmer. Big Joe was teaching his kids to read. He lacked the technique and the patience. He had simply "learned" them the alphabet and commanded them to read. Babe and Little Joe were motherless. Babe was five and Joe was seven. Uncle Pete, whose only noticeable physical want was a persistent craving for alcohol, was the other member of the family.

Babe's arms crept around Big Joe's neck and pulled his face down. Her cheeks were wet with tears. "I don' wanna learn to read, Pop."

"Oh, but you gotta. I promised your Mom. If we get a crop, I'm going to send you to a good school where they'll learn you easy." 128

127 McKimney, "The Drouth of '34" Kansas Magazine (1935), pp. 22-24

128 Annett, "The Tooteress" Saturday Evening Post (Aug. 15, 1938), pp. 16-25



Big Joe wondered that the kids did not get tired of the words, "If we get a crop." They had heard them so much. And they had never seen a crop of wheat yet. This year, however, Big Joe had a good stand of wheat--one hundred acres of it--not on his own place but across the road on Uncle Pete's half-section. Barring the accident of hail, two or three weeks should see it harvested. Big Joe's crop was threatened by a letter from the Machinery Sales Corporation:

You have a long past due account with us which with accumulated interest, now amounts to \$1243.87. We understand that this year you have prospects of a sizable crop of wheat. We hope, therefore, that you will arrange to clean up this old balance. 129

The account was the remains of a debt which Big Joe had incurred by the purchase of three tractors in 1932, the first disastrous year of the drought; when he was unable to make the payment on the tractors, the company had repossessed two of them. That was in 1933. But the third tractor had been buried deep beneath a mammoth sand dune over on Uncle Pete's place. Neither the company nor Big Joe had ever expected to see the tractor again. The company had gotten the original down payment and repossessed two practically new tractors. Big Joe got nothing and continued to have nothing for six long years as the drought continued its heartbreaking course. As far as Big Joe was concerned, the tractor deal was closed with himself holding the bag. Then one day last fall the kids had discovered that the sand dune was

moving on, bringing the buried tractor to light and with it a granary containing enough wheat to seed one hundred acres. Then it rained and the wheat grew.

Now the buzzards would seize half of it to settle a bill, a large part of which was interest. Once his wheat had been seeded he had reported to the company the recovery of the tractor so they could come and get it. But apparently they did not want the tractor.

"It ain't right," Big Joe growled indignantly, although the payment of legitimate debts was almost a religion with him.

"Write 'em a letter," he had barked angrily at little Joe,-----

He strode up and down the kitchen, pausing now and then to survey little Joe's exceedingly untidy penmanship and dictating wrathfully:

For six years nothin' grew in this country but Russian thistles and interest. And some years the Russian thistle was awful damn stunted. But you folks expect a full crop of interest every year. This bill is for the tractor the wind buried. I didn't bury it. Now the wind has uncovered it again and you can have it. But that's all you can have. It ain't in the best of shape, but neither would you have been if you was buried for six years.-----

"I guess that's telling 'em," he muttered. 130

The next time Big Joe went to town he was telling Ed Hindson about his children's education. Ed told him the children should have a tutor. There were teachers out of work who would teach cheap rather than be on relief. Ed promised he would get him one. Soon the wheat was about ready to cut. Ed staked Big Joe to tractor fuel to harvest his crop. There were the remains of six binders on the place, and using parts of all of them Big Joe got two that would

work. He hooked the tractor to the two binders and sailed into Uncle Pete's hundred acre field. Things were at last coming his way. Uncle Pete and Little Joe shocked bundles. On the second day of the harvest Ed Hindson drove out to announce that a tutor would be there on the next weekly train. When the time came Uncle Pete went to meet the tutor. A man with a curious high-stepping gait got off the train and when asked if he was the "tooter" said, "And can I toot." On the way home the "tooter" shared his bottle with Uncle Pete. When they arrived at Big Joe's, the drunken "tooter" was put in Uncle Pete's room. After they had accomplished this feat Ed drove up, demanding why they had not met the tutor. He had her, Miss Hans, in his car.

Big Joe gasped, "I didn't figure on a--a toot-  
eress."-----

She was a smallish person, even skinny. Her mouth was small and thin-lipped, her eyes sharp as a terrier's. Her nose was kind of hooked and her chin pointed out and up toward the point of her nose.

"'Scuse me, Ma'am," growled Big Joe, "I'm afraid you ain't goin' to like it here."

"We've got to like it," said Miss Hans firmly.

"Yeah, I guess, we gotta, whether we like it or not." 131

Uncle Pete came out, dragging the fellow from his bed. It turned out he was a deputy sheriff looking for section 6, township 35. That was Big Joe's place. Miss Hans by questioning learned the wheat was planted on Uncle Pete's land and urged that they thresh it out and sell it at once and that they say they were working for Uncle Pete. It must be done before the deputy re-



turned to find out the wheat had been grown on Section 7.

"The tractor and the seed just happened to be across there, so we put the crop in there." 132

Welfare problems at the first of this period were easily dealt with, since nearly every one was truthful, appreciative, and willing to cooperate. Few would take help who did not actually need it and need it badly. But after a time things changed. The shiftless and dishonest and even those who had been so appreciative at first came boldly and brazenly, and took all they could get without so much as a 'thank you.' One of Margaret Weymouth Jackson's delightful stories about Sugar County (which she says is only the name of any rural county), gives a good insight into this subject. Mrs. Nolte, the welfare director of Sugar County, had had a strenuous and difficult morning. A number of controversial matters had been up before her desk, not the least of which was the matter of Luther Kemp's deeding his farm in the Coon Creek neighborhood to his niece Leota and applying for old-age assistance. He was seventy-four, hale and hearty. He had never been sick a day that anyone could remember. A bit gnarled with the years, he still had many a good day's work in him, and Mrs. Nolte felt he should have done one of two things. He either should have stayed on the farm and maintained himself as he had done in excellent bachelor style for fifty years, or he should have turned the farm over to the welfare board, stayed on it



and then, at his death, the board could sell the farm, repay itself for what had been advanced to Luther, and the balance should go to Leota. But worse even than Luther had been the matter of the son and daughter of Old Peter and Mary Mason coming in and signing the papers that they could do nothing for their aged parents. Young Peter had a good job and his wife and son both worked. They must have about seventy-five dollars a week in earnings among the three of them. They owned their home. They had a car, a fine radio, good rugs on the floor. Yet they came into the office and without turning a hair, they signed the papers declaring themselves incompetent to care for their aged and ailing parents. So when a tall young man came into the office leading a tall stout old lady, Mrs. Nolte was braced at once to be severe.

"Aren't you Mrs. Abbey?" she asked. "Haven't you been living at the poor farm?"

The young man spoke eagerly. He was a nice looking lad, about nineteen or twenty, with clean patched overalls.

"I'm the grandson," he said, "Mark De Witte is my name. Mrs. Abbey is my mother's mother." 133

Mrs. Abbey had lived with her daughter's family when the children were small. But she had gone blind and the children's mother had to work outside, and Mrs. Abbey, finally feeling she could do little to help, said she would go to the poor farm. Mrs. Nolte seemed to remember that Mr. De Witte had urged her to leave. The De Witte family had heard that grandma could now get help under the blind persons' law.

"Well, then," the boy said, "couldn't Grandma get that money? If she could she could come home with us. I'm going to get married this spring to Jessie Beaver. We're fixing up a house on her father's place.-----"

The old lady had not spoken, but now her deep voice filled the room.

"I went to the poor farm because there didn't seem to be anything else for me to do except take my own life and I got religious convictions against that. But it is the first time in my life I ever ate the bread of charity, and I would like to get off the poor farm before I die. I don't want to die there. That's all. And Mark was always better to me nor any of them."-----

"I see no reason why she isn't eligible for aid," said Mrs. Nolte.-----

The old lady's hands were trembling with her pleasure.-----The boy's face shone. 134

When Angus Tripp, the manager of the poor farm, heard Mrs.

Abbey was to leave he became very angry and accused Mrs. Nolte of trying to close the poor farm and take the bread out of his children's mouths. The poor farm could take care of twenty people in a pinch and there were only nine there now, and when Mrs. Abbey left there would be only eight. Some of the other inmates, hearing about Mrs. Abbey's pension, were going to try to get aid also. A few days later Mrs. White, one of the case workers, told Mrs. Nolte that Mrs. Abbey's son-in-law, Marcus De Witte, had taken her to his home. He was after that fifteen dollars a month. There was nothing Mrs. Nolte could do about it.

But she was not surprised when at almost closing time, Mark and his girl, a pretty black-eyed youngster, came tearing into the office. The boy

was almost crying. "Look," he said to Mrs. Nolte, "Can Pa do this to us? He's got Grandma, and he says her place is with him, and he's going to keep her there and the law's on his side. He didn't say that in front of her face, of course, but he told us plenty. He says he took care of her for years when she didn't have a cent, and he's the one to have her now if she's going to have fifteen dollars a month. He says she owes him plenty, and she can have my bed when I get married and she can pay the two dollars for rent and the eight dollars for board and a dollar for fuel and all the rest of it to him, except when she has to have the doctor. He says that there's other children in the family besides me, and if I don't like it I can get out."

"You see," said Jessie, "we can't get married without Grandma. Pa's going to charge us ten dollars a month rent for the house and we figured Grandma's allowance will just make it possible. Mark's only going to earn ten dollars a week and we'll be poor even so, but with Mark's grandma---."

Mrs. Nolte felt as though she were going to be sick.

"Look," said Mark, "we didn't start this to get her fifteen dollars. Honest we didn't, Mrs. Nolte. I've always wanted to get Grandma off the poor farm. She was so good to me when I was little. I used to sit on her lap. Jessie and I love her. We'd like to have her anyway, and if we can, get along without her pension, and just take care of her. I know it's disgusting but Pa don't want her. He never did. Ma won't stand up to him. Grandma'd come to us if she could. I know she would."

"The pension hasn't been allowed yet," said Mrs. Nolte. "We'll see about it." 135

When Mrs. Nolte had become director for the county two years before she had not been able to sleep at night for the burden of the miseries of others. But now she had become, not hardened, but adjusted to the limitations of her office. But the thought of the relations and the poor farm manager fighting



over the old lady who had been unwanted and neglected for years was a little hard to take. Mrs. Abbey's approval papers came Saturday and a neighbor of De Witte's came in to say Mrs. Abbey wanted to see Mrs. Nolte. After church Sunday Mrs. Nolte drove out to see her. Rick Abbey and his wife were there also to take Grandma home with them. Mrs. Abbey wanted to see Mrs. Nolte alone but to get her alone Mrs. Nolte had to lead her outdoors. The old lady was trembling a little and said in a breathless way:

"Couldn't you put me in your car and take me to town and find me a place to board. I don't want to stay here and I don't want to go to my son's. After a while, when Mark and Jessie's been married and the new's wore off I'd like to go with them. But now I want to be by myself a little while." 136

Mrs. Nolte acted promptly and put the little old lady in her car and drove away. She was a little frightened. She might get into trouble. She took Mrs. Abbey to a friend of hers and installed her there and then went home. As she expected, the De Wittes and Abbeys soon came. Mrs. Nolte had the sheriff there. Mr. De Witte was furious and stormed and threatened, but the sheriff shut him up. Mr. De Witte was threatening her with the Lindbergh Act when they finally left her house. A day or so later Angus Tripp was in Mrs. Nolte's office. He was quiet and he was controlled, but his anger was deadly.

"A lot you care what happens to me, if you can build up your department," he said. "My wife and I



and our kids have got to live and I'm warning you, Mrs. Nolte, that if you cause the removal of another person from the poor farm, I'll get you if it's the last thing I do in this world. I've got good connections and right now you're in a place where one false move from you and you're out on the back of your neck and you'll never have another job on the public pay roll."-----

Down on the courtlawn an itinerant group of Salvation Army workers were holding a meeting. Their voices came up to her:

"Abide with me! Fast falls the eventide;  
the darkness deepens.-----" 137

"The Happiest Man on Earth" is a story of a man, down and out, that landed a job. During this period to be out of a job was a tragedy, for it was nearly impossible to get a job once you were out. Every one who could keep a job was holding on to it. Sometimes the women in the family could get work but the men could not. Then the men did the work at home, looked after the children, and did the marketing. If the railroads, shops, or factories laid off men, it usually meant the job, seniority and all, was gone. Some men from the Plains States went east and some went west; some came back, but most of them stayed where they could get jobs.

"The Happiest Man on Earth" by Albert Maltz was chosen for the O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories of 1938. Jesse Fulton had walked from Kansas City, Missouri, to Tulsa, Oklahoma, through nights of rain and weeks of scorching sun, without sleep or a decent meal. He was sustained by the thought that he would get a job in Tulsa. His brother-in-law, Tom Brackett, lived there. Now

Jesse was in his office. Tom glanced at him but did not recognize him; so Jesse told him who he was.

He surveyed Fulton incredulously, trying to measure the resemblance to his brother-in-law as he remembered him. This man was tall, about thirty. That fitted! He had straight good features and a lank erect body. That was right, too. But the face was too gaunt, the body too spiny under the baggy clothes for him to be sure. His brother-in-law had been a solid strong young man with muscle and beef to him. Jesse stood quiet. Inside he was seething. Brackett was like a man examining a piece of broken-down horseflesh; there was a look of pure pity in his eyes. It made Jesse furious. He knew he wasn't as far gone as all that.-----

"Why are you limping?"

"I stepped on a stone; it jagged a hole through my shoe." Jesse pulled his feet back under the chair. He was ashamed of his shoes. They had come from the relief originally, and two weeks on the road had about finished them. All morning with a kind of delicious, foolish solemnity, he had been vowing to himself that before anything else, before even a suit of clothes, he was going to buy himself a brand new pair of shoes.

Tom Brackett had never seen anyone who looked more down and out. He had heard from his sister but she never mentioned how bad off they must be. When Tom said this to Jesse, he only returned softly that they knew Tom had had his troubles too. But finally Jesse came to the point.

"Tom, listen," Jesse said, "I come here on purpose." He thrust his hand through his hair. "I want you to help me."-----Brackett groaned. He had been expecting this. "I can't help much. I only get thirty-five a week and I'm damn grateful for it."-----"I know you can't help us with money! But we met a man who works for you! He was in our city! He said you could give me a job!"

Brackett groaned aloud. "You came walking from Kansas City in two weeks so I could give you



a job.---God Almighty, there ain't no jobs, Jesse! It's a slack season. And you don't know this oil business. It's special. I got my Legion friends here but they couldn't do nothin' now. Don't you think I'd ask for you as soon as there was a chance?"

-----"Oh, no, you don't want to work in my department," Brackett told him in the same low voice. You don't know what it is."

"Yes, I do," Jesse insisted. "He told me all about it, Tom. You're a dispatcher, ain't you? You send the dynamite trucks out?"

"Now you listen to me," Brackett said. "I'll tell you a few things you should have asked before you started out. It ain't dynamite you drive. They don't use anything as safe as dynamite in drilling oil wells. They wish they could, but they can't. It's nitro-glycerine! Soup!-----You just have to look at this soup, see? You just cough loud and it blows!"

-----"I don't care about that, Tom. You told me. Now you got to be good to me and give me the job."

"No."-----

"Tom, I just can't live like this any more. I got to be able to walk down the street with my head up."-----"Is my life worth anything now? We're just starving at home, Tom. They ain't put us back on relief yet."

-----"I'll borrow some money and we'll telegraph it to Ella; then you go home and get back on relief."-----

"I ain't done right for Ella, Tom. Ella deserved better. This is the only chance I see in my whole life to do something for her. I've just been a failure."-----

-----"You say you're thinking about Ella. How's she going to take it when you get killed?" "Maybe I won't," Jesse pleaded. "I've got to have some luck sometime."-----

-----"The only thing certain is that sooner or later you get killed."

"Then I do! But meanwhile I got something, don't I? I can buy a pair of shoes. Look at me! I can buy a suit that don't say 'Relief' by the way it fits. I can smoke cigarettes. I can buy some candy for the kids. I can eat some myself. Yes, by God, I want to eat some candy. I want a glass of beer once a day. I want Ella dressed up. I want her to eat meat three times a week, four times, maybe. I want to take my family to the

movies," -----"On six hundred a month look how much I can save! If I last only three months, look how much it is-----a thousand dollars--more! And maybe I'll last longer. Maybe a couple years. I can fix Ella up for life!"---"I'll tell her I make only forty. You put the rest in a bank account for her, Tom."

"O, shut up," Brackett said. "You think you'll be happy?----"

"I'll be happy! Don't you worry. I'll be so happy, I'll be singing"----"I'm going to feel proud of myself for the first time in seven years!" ----"I'll send a wire to Ella," Brackett said in the same hoarse weary voice. "I'll tell her you got a job, and you'll send her fare in a couple of days. You'll have some money then--that is, if you last the week out, you jackass." 138

As Jesse went out, the wet film blinded him but the whole world seemed to have turned golden. He limped slowly, with the blood pounding his temples and a wild incommunicable joy in his heart.

"I'm the happiest man in the world," he whispered to himself. "I'm the happiest man on the whole earth." 139

Dorothy Thomas' The Home Place is written as a series of short stories and tells how the young married children came back to the farm to live with the old folks. The destitute old folks were having difficulties and expecting help from the "children" in the city, but instead the young came to be a burden on them. Phyllis and Ralph Young were back at the old farm place.

Waking before she was aware of Ralph's heavy breathing and the warmth of his body beside her, Phyllis thought first that she was in her own blue

138 Maltz, "The Happiest Man of Earth" O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories of 1938, pp. 3-15

139 Ibid.



bed in her father's house, and then that she was in the big maple bed in the house that Ralph had built for her when everything was fine. She opened her eyes, and saw the eight gray squares that made the windows in the winter dawn and knew that she was in the old fourposter bed in Grandma Young's room in the little house on the Young home place. 140

They were back at Ralph's folks. Tom, Ralph's brother and his wife, Edna, and their three rough boys were there too, besides Grandma Young and Ralph's father and mother. Edna's boys would tease and frighten Betty, Phyllis' five year old. Edna was a stolid, hard working woman. Tom showed very little affection for her. Ralph was a loving considerate husband. While Phyllis and Ralph were dressing to go down to breakfast, Phyllis said:

"Ralph, I'm going to say something--I can't stand it any longer!--We've as much right in this house, to peace in this house, as Edna and Tom have. The boys tease and tease Betty, until she cries out in her sleep: 'Don't, George! Quit, Tommy!' There's no sense in boys their size picking on a little thing like Betty."---

"Better go easy," Tom said. "Edna's so sour now she don't even look at me. Never says a word."-----

In the kitchen there was already a good warmth and the smell of burning cobs and hot grease and coffee. Edna stood at the stove, a crock of pancake batter in one hand and a case knife in the other. She scorned the pancake turner Phyllis had brought from her home. She did not turn or speak. 141

Phyllis usually waited until Edna went to feed the chickens before she put up Betty's school lunch because she knew it irritated Edna to see her putting the thermos bottle full of chocolate or soup and an orange or apple into the child's pail.

140 Thomas, The Home Place (1936) p. 3

141 Ibid., p.6

Tom has lost his "place" and strangers lived there now. Ralph had been helped by his father and Tom but had failed and lost his "place" too. Edna hated Ralph and Phyllis, and Tom carried a scornful silent grudge. Things were in a bad way and Mr. Young had been trying to borrow money.

"I went in to see Walter," the old man said in the stillness. "He said last spring, he thought he could let me have something, but now he can't. I don't know how we're going to feed the winter." The boys looked at him without saying anything. They were both surprised that their father should have thought Walter or anybody else would lend them money. "I helped Walter out back there. I helped him twice."----"And he'd help me if he could."----He chewed slowly awhile and said: "We better write Harvey." 142

Would Harvey, with his good job and his bachelor apartment and his car, help them? He had not written and they were sure he knew how things were in Nebraska. While they were waiting for Harvey to write, Tom and Ralph clashed. Ralph came in and Phyllis could see he was angry.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh--plenty."

----"I had it out with Tom"----Said if he and Dad hadn't mortgaged Tom's place to start me out, they'd have his place yet. Why, Dad himself was all for me buying that combine, you know he was. Lord, I guess I worked as hard on this place as he did. Threw it up to me about those two years in Ag school. Lord, he could a gone too if he'd had the gumption. Dad wanted him to go. That combine! ----Yeah! I socked him. Only thing I'm sorry for it wasn't out in the field."

"Ralph! What'd he do?"

"Nothing. He got up and came for me, and I

hit him again. Then Mamma came in-----" 143

Days went by with no word from Harvey:

"---He's such a boy! The old woman said.  
"He's got on well but he's a free spender, too.  
I doubt if Harvey's got it to send, I wouldn't  
be surprised if he pretty well lives up what he  
makes. A boy not married, you know, he can't  
lay much by, there in a city. Too many places  
for it. He'll be put out if he has to dis-  
appoint them."

"If he can't help, what'll they do?" asked  
Phyllis.

"God knows," Mamma Young said and added:  
"---I trust." 144

That evening Mamma Young saw someone coming in from the road.

It looked like a man and woman. Ralph recognized Harvey first.

"---Harvey! Why, you old---" Ralph said loudly, and  
Mamma Young cried: "Harvey!" and threw her arms about  
the young man's neck. Grandpa came in, and while they  
were all greeting their youngest and dearest, Phyllis  
had time to take as good a look at the girl with him  
as the lamplight would allow. She was a small, very  
slender girl in a short gray fur jacket. Her slim,  
thin-stockinged legs were red and shivering with the  
cold. She moved toward the stove, took a violet  
handkerchief from her sleeve, and wiped her small  
nose. Yellow hair fell in disorderly crinkled  
strands over her cheeks. ----"Oh, this is Cleo.----  
My wife.-----" 145

Harvey, looking around, saw that all the family were there.

"Yes, we're all here," Tom said loudly.  
Better know it first as last. "Had to let my  
place go. Ralph lost his. We're all here---"

"That's right, Son," the old man said  
guiltily; "it couldn't be helped. We've got  
just this place. Corn's better'n most around  
here, but it's not much. I don't know how we're  
going to feed the winter." 146

- 143 Ibid.,p.40
- 144 Ibid.,p.42
- 145 Ibid.,p.46
- 146 Ibid.,p.48



Mamma Young asked Harvey if they came in their own car.

-----"I haven't any car, Mamma," Harvey said, like a child who wants to confess everything and be forgiven; "I haven't a thing. My job blew up four months ago. We--hitch-hiked." 147

The American Mercury is noted for its ridicule and cynicism and George Milburn is a fit author to contribute to it. "A Pretty Cute Little Stunt" is a story of the Rotary bunch which, however, sounds plausible when one recollects some of their stunts. George Milburn is an Oklahoman and Garden City is a town in western Kansas; so this must be a Plains State story. Harry is telling his friend R. A., who missed the fun, all about it.

-----I wish you could have been out to Rotary today. You certainly missed a treat. They pulled off a pretty cute little stunt, and I'm right here to tell you it would of give you something to think about, you old Pallwalloper, you; ----The chief called me up on the phone about 11:30 and says, Harry, we've got a bum in jail down here, and he claims that he's an old ex-member of Rotary. He's been aggravating the life out of us, telling us that he's got a message that he's got to get to you boys some way. The first thing that occurred to me was it was some kind of a joke.-----The chief didn't let on a bit, though. He was just as serious as he could be. He says, "Yes, he's got the Rotary button and the credentials, but of course he could have stolen those some place. But he tells a pretty straight story and if you've got time I wish you'd come down to the station and take a look at him." 148

Harry went down to the jail and found a very dirty bum; so he called the secretary of the Rotary and he agreed to invite the bum to the regular meeting dinner. The bum asked that he be called

147 Ibid., p.50

148 Milburn, "A Pretty Cute Little Stunt," O'Brien, Best Stories of 1931



Oscar. When Oscar came in all eyes were upon him, but no one explained. He ate an enormous dinner. Then he was introduced and made an eloquent and touching speech. He related how the early disciples of the church spent a lot of time in jail and had much time for meditation and this had a lot to do "with the purity and inspiration" of their message, and so forth and so forth. He quoted "The House by the Side of the Road." He told heart-rending stories of crippled children.

"R. A., I'm right here to tell you that when that ragged bum finished that story ever' one around that table was a sniffing and a snubbling and making dabs at their eyes and trying to grin and make out like they wasn't crying at all. If any speaker ever had magnetism, that man certainly had it. The way he used psychology on them wasn't even funny.-----

"He says, 'Now I know what a lot of you boys been thinking I've been leading up to, but you're wrong. I'm not going to make any plea for money or aid of any kind. If you was to offer it to me I wouldn't take your money, because that wouldn't be Rotary. But just remember what I told you about fellowship and try to be a little more like that Master Rotarian of long ago.'" 149

After his touching speech Gay introduced him as the Reverend Oscar D. Sneathen, pastor of the first Christian Church of Garden City. Each Rotarian was expected to "chip in" a dollar or two a piece for the minister so that his traveling expenses could be paid to some other town so that they could enjoy the "pretty cute little stunt."

Jennie Harris Oliver has written many stories of Oklahoma, stories of the cotton cropper, the school teacher, and the misunder-

stood sensitive child and woman. She sees the beauty and the ethereal in the common place.

"Before Sunrise," a story of faith and love, was written with the Wichita Mountains as its setting. Each year, thousands of people gather there to see the sacred pageant put on by the people of Lawton, Oklahoma. Hart Mathuen had been a baritone singer in the Church of the Chimes and people had come from far and near especially to hear him sing. But one Easter Sunday he had been in a car accident and was injured so that he would never walk without a crutch again. He had retired to his parents' farm and had given up his public singing. This year Arthur Litson, affectionately known as the "Little Man of the Pageant," persuaded him to sing in the great outdoor Easter Pageant.

He was stumbling to catch the evening bus to the city of the Easter pageant when the unusual happened. At the door of the bus a girl stopped him. Looking down, he saw a slender figure in a bright green shirt crisscrossed by the shoulder straps of green slacks. He glimpsed great braids of gorgeous red hair and a forefinger tied up in a white rag. Then he had made the top step of the crowded bus; he was seated with the girl--he next the window so that he might have some place to rest his crutch. The girl had silently handed him a letter. 150

The letter was from Litson and introduced Sara McElhaney, who was to take the part of the Magdalene.

For weeks the red earth of Oklahoma had slept under the spell of winter drought, gray as ashes. But at last it had stirred and silently opened its eyes. Between its lovely green lashes looked forth

such a multitude of golden petals that whenever the pulsing light of passing cars rested the earth was as bright as heaven. All the roads leading down into the bright valley of the Easter pageant trembled with travel--travelers on foot and on horse back; travelers in wagons, buses, trucks, railway trains and automobiles. 151

The red-headed girl in a green slack suit told Hart how she had cut her finger and couldn't wash dishes; so her father had put her to "hopping curb" at one of his string of restaurants. The slack suit was a uniform. Hart no longer allowed himself to be young and dreaded being with this girl.

----I'm trying to imagine myself Mary Magdalene-- It's hard. I don't know much about forgiveness. And I know even less about love. Last night after Mr. Liston's letter came I got the Bible from the shelf and sat up till morning reading.----I'm in three tableaux. One is where I push myself in at Simon's dinner party and weep and break an expensive box of precious ointment. Another is where I go with--with Him up the lonely Hill of Calvary.--152

Hart was thinking of his life for the last two years:

-----he had hidden himself away on the farm with his people. But now he was taking this journey at Easter, was going to sing his heart out for a great audience who could not distinguish himself from other shadows, all for the sake of the one man who treated him as if he were normal; who did not pass on the information that nerve specialists had said the singer would never walk again without a crutch. 153

The bus came to stop on the ridge above the city. Passen-

151 Ibid.  
152 Ibid.  
153 Ibid.



'gers with quilts and blankets snatched up bundles of kindling and went stumbling in the darkness to a place to view the pageant. When it was time for Hart to sing, Sara insisted on going with him to help him. When it came time for her first appearance, she almost lost her nerve but went on. Mrs. Callyhan, watching Sara kneeling at His feet, said:

"Poor Little Thing!---Brought up by that stingy heathen, Scorb McElhaney, no boy friends---no parties--all that load of hair! And now, with a stepmother owning a string of coffee houses, made to wash dishes and cut herself with paring knives, hired out in a play she's been taught not to believe! No wonder she goes all to pieces acting the hypocrite. You see, I know all about it. Just breaks my heart." 154

Later in the pageant in the mob scene Hart, stumbling with his crutch, and Sara, tripping in her long robe with her hair in her eyes, managed to reach even the Prisoner bearing his piteous load. It was windy and cold on the mountain side. Finally it was all over, and Sara and Hart were alone cold and exhausted. Sara was sobbing:

"The tragedy is over," Hart soothed her. "All my life," she said, "I have been taught there is no God--no Son of God and no Resurrection. But, Hart, I've never seen the dandelions glimmer in the spring that I didn't feel that after the silence and darkness we call death, we shall live again." She stopped choked with tears. "Tonight was a play," she continued, "but what happened two thousand years ago was real. I know it was real. I felt Him here living again. Oh, Hart, didn't you feel Him helping you sing?"

-----He heard a strange sound--not like the wind; himself, sobbing. And then his will, straining away from his vain pride and bitterness, broke. "Yes, dearest," he answered, "I did feel Him here. I felt he was offering



me life--new life." 155

When Arthur Litson, missing them, climbed the Hill of the Lonely Crosses, he saw coming toward him Hart Mathuen without his crutch, his face shining like an angel's, carrying in his arms the Little Magdalene.

So with a little of the ethereal, of the beautiful, of the real, and of the tragic this period is pictured as it closes. Or does it close in 1938? It is hard to say, but it seems that a change is due, a change to think differently as a body on subjects we have thought alike on before. A Kansas student returning from a university on the west coast was amazed to find the shifting opinion on European affairs so generally uniform throughout his state. There is a solidarity even in the changing of opinion in the Plains States. Is it due to the history, the geography, the ease of communication and travel? It is there, whether it be for Brinkley for governor of Kansas or Roosevelt for president of the United States. There is a sharp tendency from North Dakota to Texas to be at one with each other. The philosophy, attitudes, ambitions, and waves of sentiment are alike, changeable as they may be from time to time. In the short story stark realism may change to the romantic; but whatever the tendency, it will be general throughout the region.

The short story with its singleness of purpose covers but a

brief period in the life of its characters and seldom deals with the humdrum of life but strives to select a time when there is complication, struggle, or climax. So the breaking of the sod, the organizing of rural schools and churches, and the ordinary phases necessary to the growth of a section do not receive just recognition in local color stories while the cowboy and the dust storm are over-stressed because of their appeal to and effect on the reading public.

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