

## FRAGMENTS.

[Written for THE COURIER.]

I SEE from my window a background of the deepest blue sky. There are bits of drab clouds floating near the horizon. Away in the distance the somber brown prairies stretch out as level as a floor. Here and there to break the awful monotony are little farm-houses standing on the bare prairie, lonely and forsaken in appearance. The sun shines fiercely down, but all its gold cannot infuse light or cheerfulness into the scene. In the immediate foreground I see some ugly brick stores; a little farther off some smaller stores, then some small dwelling houses, then a bit of prairie, and a straggling fragment of the town lying on the side of a hill.

I gaze and gaze at the cheerless scene and my heart aches, it is so lonely. A city all about me, but all its people are strangers to me. As I sit and dream and long for other days and other scenes, a little brown bird flies on the window ledge, and twitters and jerks his head to one side, and gazes up in my face. The sun sends a bright beam through the window, and a song floats up from some place I know not where, and I am happy.

It is a gloomy day. The clouds came up this morning and hung their gray curtains over the blazing sun and everything looks gray and dreary. The tiny particles of mist that float in the air gather on the naked branches of the trees and form in great silver beads that drop slowly on the damp gray grass that borders the walks of the city. The flag on the building over there droops and hangs listlessly and the stars and stripes are huddled together in a mass of color. The brown birds flit here and there and alight on the brown branches, and shake from their coats the dampness gathered as they flew through the mists. The lazy smoke from many a chimney pours out its grimy volume and lurks about the house-tops as though reluctant to go out into the damp atmosphere. Suddenly along the damp gray street a funeral procession winds its way. The horses with their nets of solemn black, the heavy tassels swaying with every motion, the doleful faces staring blankly from the windows of the heavy cabs, all combine to fill the mind with gloomy thoughts. On goes the procession out into the hazy, misty distance, and soon the great earth-clouds have fallen down and hidden the last carriage from our sight. And then with a sign we turn to go about our work.

The winds of Nebraska are ever present. They blow from morning until night with a steady irritating force that almost drives a person wild. The first thing in the morning is a gust that comes up and as you turn a street corner, your hat is lifted from your head and goes rolling down the street and you run after it, saying under your breath, things that are not found in the prayer-book.

All day long the dust blows in at your window. The vines that hang against the wall swing ceaselessly. You get tired of their motion. The grass out in the yard is combed from dawn until dawn again by the invisible teeth of the wind. The trees bend and sway until it is a wonder they are not worn out.

The night wind blows around the house and its sighing voice fills the soul with unrest. As you lie down to rest the mournful song of the wind makes you feel as though the air was full of the wailing of lost souls. As you fall asleep at last, worn out with the toils of the day, the winds moan a last lullaby, and your ears are deaf for a while at least, to the monotonous blowing of the wind.

Hark! I hear the tread of winter  
Beating on the barren sod,  
Treading through the blasted corn-fields  
And his feet are hunger shod.

Gaunt and grisly, through the grain fields,  
With his icy flowing beard,  
And beside him, boon companion,  
Death, his bony form hath reared.

Hark! I hear the tread of winter  
And the softer tread of death,  
Nearing with the year that's waning,  
And I feel their bitter breath.

Hand in hand they come together

O'er the blasted burned out west,  
Winter with his hungry garments,  
Death with bare and bony breast.

—WILLIAM REED DUNROY.

## AND THEN.

(Written for THE COURIER.)

A LEVEL tract of prairie land with not a tree in sight. Somber and brown the floor of grass stretches out until the great dome of the fiercely blue sky fits down closely and shuts you in a world by yourself. The golden rod that was once so brilliant and shown like jewels on the prairie now stands old and gray, like an old man tottering in the wind. The birds' nests are empty and the tall weeds that marked their places are broken and old. The stript cornfields look bleak and cheerless in the distance and the stubble fields that once waved with billows of gold are brown and gloomy and sad.

Far out to the right you see a sod house. It is low and huddles down to the prairie as though it were afraid of the Nebraska winds. On the roof are tall weeds that have gone to seed, and from the ragged walls a thin coat of grizzled grass waves in the winter winds. Out near the house are the straw built sheds with their tumb's down appearance. The cattle stand at the straw-stack and eat. The horses, loose from their stalls, rub their necks together and stand idly on three feet, looking sleepy and unconcerned. About the sheds are grouped the farm implements, their former red and blue brilliant coats now faded and dingy.

Slowly and dejected a young man walks down the path that leads from the barn to the house. He is tall and well formed. His clothes are clean but rough. And old cap rests carelessly upon his light curls. His eyes are blue and his cheeks are a bronze red in color. He goes out near the straw sheds and stands with his hands in his pockets. He looks across the fields and sees where the drouth has left them bare and clean. He looks towards the house and sighs. There is crepe on the door. It floats out and he catches sight of it as he stands there. He turns away and his eyes fall upon a little head-board sticking up from the prairie to the right of the house. It is a pitifully small grave that he sees there, too small for that great, wide prairie to hold. He turns impatiently again toward the barn. He stands among the cattle and horses and talks aloud as if they could hear and understand him. "So this is the end of it all? All my planning and my hoping. Can it be possible that two short years can work such fearful changes in a man's life? How happy we were, Mary and I when we came out here to these flat prairies. We thought we had a palace in that sod house yonder. We worked day and night and made it comfortable and pleasant. And then the long nights when we read and talked over old times! How sweet they were! Then when baby came. O, God! how sweet the time; but now how bitter.

"The hot winds came from the south and blew all day on the fields; but we thought it would last. Mary prayed that the rain might fall, and she was good and I thought her prayers would surely be answered, but they were not. Not even a cloud came up to hide us from the hellish rays of the sun. The great brassy sky covered us for days and at last one dreadful day the very gates of hell seemed opened, and hot blasts blew upon us from morning until night. The baby died that day. Since that Mary has drooped like a flower. Today she died. She lies up there in the house. She will be buried tomorrow—and then." WILLIAM REED DUNROY.

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