

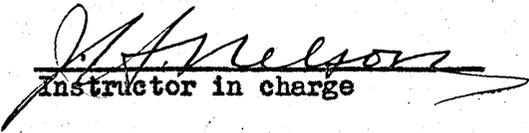
KANSAS NATURE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY KANSAS NOVEL

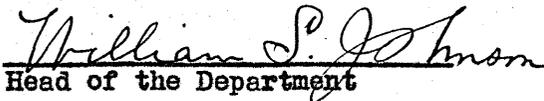
by

Laura Grover Adams
Bachelor of Arts Degree
The University of Kansas, 1925

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Approved by:


Instructor in charge


Head of the Department

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PREFACE

The purpose of the present study is to show by discussion and excerpts the use which novelists who have laid the scenes of their stories in Kansas have made of nature in the state. The detailed account which follows will make clear the place these authors assign nature in their works, and the influence they conceive nature to have had on character and plot.

For aid and advice during the writing of this thesis I am indebted to Professor J.H. Nelson and other members of the Department of English of the University of Kansas, in particular to the late Professor S.L. Whitcomb, under whom the study was begun. I am also grateful to the librarian of the University of Kansas for many favors, and to the librarians of the State Historical Society at Topeka, through whose aid much material, otherwise unavailable, was obtained.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTORY

In this chapter, the discussion of Kansas nature in the novels of the Kansas authors will be general, leaving for succeeding chapters the work of illustration in detail.

In reading the novels classed as Kansan, it will be discovered that most of the authors have a lively interest in nature, and include one phase or another of it in nearly all their works. A list of Kansas novelists who make frequent mention of Kansas nature in their works would include the following: Kate Aplington, Margaret Lynn, Kate Stephens, Margaret Hill McCarter, Max Cretcher, George W. Emerson, Hal G. Evarts, Thomas C. Hinkle, William K. Marshall, Clifford Knight, George W. Ogden, and Ruth Cowgill. There are also others whose books will be mentioned in this thesis; but their interest in nature is not so marked as is that of those just named. These authors treat nature in her various phases: some dwelling more on animals or flowers, while others describe at length the prairie contours, various atmospheric phenomena, such as tornadoes, thunderstorms, wind, heat, and the far-famed Kansas sunset. For example: Dr. Hinkle always has as the central figure in his books an animal. In Tawny, it is a dog; in Black Storm, a horse. Emerson and Marshall express themselves in very flowery terms about the different kinds of birds and plants. McCarter and Hinkle, again, give vivid descriptions of storms; thunder, snow, hail, and wind. Perhaps the best description of a tornado is the one given by Knight

in his novel, Tommy of the Voices. The reader feels that he himself is in the grip of the relentless wind, the impression created is so very vivid. The writer in question, being a native Kansan, must know whereof he speaks.

The nature has influenced the Kansas novelist to a high degree is evinced by the titles which the writers have bestowed upon their books. What greater proof of the power of nature over the thoughts of authors could be found than in the following titles?— The Land of Promise and Free Soil, by Miss Lynn; Dust, by Haldeman-Julius; Short Grass, West of Dodge, The Cow Jerry, and Trail's End, all written by George W. Ogden; The Shaggy Legion, by Hal G. Everts; The Peace of the Solomon Valley, The Price of the Prairie, Winning the Wilderness, The Cottonwood's Story, and Vanguards of the Plains, by Mrs. McCarter; Pilgrims of the Plains, by Miss Aplington; Life at Laurel Town, by Miss Stephens; The Wind Before the Dawn, by Munger; Tawny and Black Storm by Dr. Hinkle.

With most of the authors, the treatment of nature is bound up with the lives of the characters; For instance, when such writers as Cretcher, McCarter, and Munger describe the "Grasshopper years," they discuss the pest in its relation to the lives of the people upon whom the plague fell. Naturally they are more concerned about the result of the calamity than they are about the cause of the grasshoppers' coming or their status as a biological curiosity. An illustration may be found in a novel by Mrs. McCarter. A wagon train, threatened by an Indian raid, is saved through the intervention of a tornado which destroys the menacing

tribe. This is typical. In every case, unless it be with the exception of Marshall and Emerson, who tend to make much of their nature descriptions, the Kansas writer makes his treatment of nature subordinate to the lives and adventures of his characters.

Nature necessarily plays a very important part in the lives of dwellers in an essentially rural state: drouths, floods, tornadoes, crops, wild life, are the companions of the people in such a country, and they in great measure serve to weaken or strengthen character. But throughout the Kansas novel in general, the lives of the people, the human characteristics and actions, take the leading place. To a certain extent, nature is made to play into the hands of the people: as, for example, in one case, where a threatened raid by Indians and renegades upon a town is prevented by rains which flood the river valley, thus effecting a natural barrier.

It is in this that Kansas novelists are particularly successful in their treatment of Kansas nature: that they so inter-weave the natural forces into the warp and woof of the lives of the people in the books that these manifestations add to the interest and pleasure of the story. If nature were supreme in the book, and all other forces and energies were subordinated to her, the reader would quickly tire of the story, unless he were in search of a so-called "nature-story."

In a few cases, the authors have become too rhapsodic, and the reader wearies of, and, after once warned, skips over, the effusive passages about some flower, bird, or natural phenomenon, which might deserve a line or two of discussion, but certainly is not worthy of two

or three pages in praise of its beauties. Such an author is apt to lose the thread of his story, and to be forced to consume valuable time after each description in interesting his reader once more in the fortunes of the hero or heroine.

Before proceeding with the analytical part of the study, it might be worth while to pause and ask what are the favorite phases of nature to be discussed, not in relation to the various authors, as they were partially treated a few pages back, but as parts of nature. Among animals, the buffalo holds the first place of interest, as is natural. Coyotes, prairie-dogs, meadow-larks, and grasshoppers receive considerable attention. Among plants, the sunflower and the goldenrod are mentioned frequently, and of trees, the cottonwood, the elm, the locust, the willow, and the oak are all discussed at some length. Mention is made of all the kinds of storms to which a prairie country is subject, from the tornado to the dust storm. All the features of topography which are characteristic of this state are found frequently: plains, sands, ridges, ravines, gorges, hills, creeks, rivers, rocks of different kinds, minerals. All the times of the day and night, and the four seasons enter the Kansas novel very often. In fact, one finds, when one comes to examine the Kansas novel closely, that nature in all her moods and aspects is treated at considerable length.

In the pages which follow will be found a discussion of the various aspects of Kansas nature as treated by Kansas authors. Each topic will be discussed in detail, with many illustrations. The field of observation is a wide one, for Kansas novelists, being fond of

nature, and sensing its importance in a novel dealing with Kansas, have given a wealth of illustration on almost every point that could be brought up for discussion.

With this brief introduction and explanation of the purposes of this thesis, the detailed study of the subject will be taken up, beginning in the next chapter with the topic of animals.

CHAPTER II
THE FAUNA OF KANSAS

In considering the subject of the Kansas fauna, there are a few questions which might be raised before a detailed discussion is begun.

In the first place: Do the Kansas novelists dwell on the point of some animal being typical of this state alone; or do they consider the animals as native to the whole region, the country comprising the entire plains territory, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, and the other states entitled to that name? How important is the treatment of animal life in their books? Do they give it much space, or is it merely incidental to the story? Do they describe the life of animals at any length? Do their animals have anything to do with the plots of the novels: that is, do they help or hinder the human characters in any way?

The answer to the first question is that the authors do not make their animals peculiar to the state of Kansas alone. The scenes of their stories are laid in Kansas, it is true; but the animals which move through the pages might be native to any one of the plains states. The buffalo, for instance, roamed the plains of Nebraska, Colorado, and the Dakotas, just as freely as he moved about over Kansas territory. Coyotes, prairie dogs, meadow larks, wild horses, are not found within the boundaries of Kansas only, and the novelist does not treat them as if they were. He discusses them as part of the prairie life. The grasshopper hordes, which several of the Kansas authors describe at considerable length, were not confined to Kansas, nor do the authors attempt to make

them appear so.

In answer to the other questions asked above: The treatment of animal life differs with the various authors. Dr. Hinkle, for example, who makes the plot of his books center around an animal, gives the most of his story to the description of the life of this animal, to the exclusion of any human characters of importance. But most of the Kansas writers treat of animals only as they affect the life of the people in the novel. That is not saying, however, that they slight the mention of animals in the least. They do not. Over and over again is much space devoted to them, and to their actions. But this is usually in connection with some person in the story.

As for animals having any part in the plot of the story: in several novels they and their actions are of considerable importance to the people who come into contact with them. Take, for instance, the grasshopper invasions: these certainly affected the lives of the pioneers; for because of the destruction caused by these pests, many a settler gave up his land and moved back East, totally discouraged. As another instance: the buffalo furnished meat and hides for the pioneers settling in Kansas, and also for those who travelled across the state along the various trails which led to the glamorous West.

Now that these natural questions arising from a consideration of this subject have been disposed of, a detailed discussion of this topic will be entered upon, proving the previous statements by means of quotations from various authors who treat of the fauna of this

state.

Hal G. Evarts has taken for the setting of his novel, The Shaggy Legion, the time when the buffalo roamed over the plains, and was hunted by those who engaged in that occupation as a life trade.

Though the setting for this novel is Kansas, such a sight as the following, while typically Kansan, is not exclusively so, and offers an instance of the fact that the Kansas novelist does not consider the fauna as peculiar to Kansas alone:

Those who spent the major portion of their lives among the buffalo herds felt the majesty of the shaggy legion. The herds were spectacular, true, but there was some element in the sight of tens of thousands of great brown bodies moving across the plains that sunk deeper into one's consciousness. Those who saw the herds for the first time in their early youth, knew the thrill of it. And when, in old age, the last herds were sighted, there was that same wild thrill. Only the magnificent, the majestic, could have sustained the interest throughout a lifetime of familiarity. All those who knew the shaggy legion felt it. And when the buffalo was gone, the old free untrammelled West was gone. For those who had known the herds, the old West passed with the buffalo.¹

Other writers, also, while describing the buffalo, do not mention it as peculiar to Kansas. For example, C.R. Cooper has this to say:

The great valley had ceased to be a thing of green; now it was a constantly changing, slowly shifting sea of shaggy brown. Herd upon herd had centered there to rest after a tiresome journey, to feed well upon the grasses which lasted there far later into the autumn than on the ordinary stretches of the plains.²

1. Hal G. Evarts, The Shaggy Legion, pp. 306-307.
 2. The Last Frontier, pp. 287-288.

Spring was here. . . the buffalo runs were becoming deep cut again with the sharp hoofs of the thousands heading northward from the shelter of the winter months.

Spring—and the buffalo running, with the bulls bellowing for supremacy in the wallows.³

Several authors bring into their stories the coyote, though none offer any very important description of this animal indigenous to the prairie country. Perhaps the most important mention of the coyote is made by Dr. Hinkle in his book, Tawny:

The coyotes were unusually restless on this night. One, not knowing, would have supposed he heard a hundred of them,—in reality there were perhaps a half a dozen that Tom first heard to the north of him. Then many others answered with their wild yips to the east.⁴

Prairie dogs are mentioned by several authors. Cooper describes them as "staring at them from the tops of their little mounds, then popping into invisibility at their approach."⁵ Emerson discusses them at some length in Buell Hampton:

There may be 10,000 dogs within a radius of half a mile. . . I should say there were rather more than 10,000, than less, and every one of the little fellows sitting up on his haunches in such an observant way. . . When suddenly this army of prairie dogs disappeared as if by magic into their burrowed homes. . . It is said they migrate in companies from one locality to another, and live principally on roots.⁶

Antelope are described by several authors in the terms of "shy"⁷ and "fleeing"⁸. One writer makes several references to jack-rabbits; but only one of these passages is of enough importance to quote here:

3. The Last Frontier, pp. 118-119.
4. Pp. 69-70.
5. The Last Frontier, p. 156.
6. Pp. 270-271.
7. Cretcher, The Kansan, p. 11.
8. Cooper, The Last Frontier, p. 113.

Jack-rabbits started up, scorning in their amazing speed to do more than run on three legs, while looking back at the cantering horse and rider.⁹

Though not true only of Kansas, the following passages are of enough value and interest, perhaps, to quote here, as affording a glimpse of the strange effect which mutual fear has upon animals and birds:

The sky soon became overcast with a yellow haze that rapidly changed to deep lead color. Chattering birds soared high, in confused circles, then swung away to the south on steady wing. Frightened deer and antelope ran in droves through the outskirts of the town, timid no longer in the face of the great danger sweeping toward them from the north.¹⁰

Then a wildly novel scene occurred. Flocks of prairie hens, quails, meadow larks, and thrushes, all blinded, singed, and frightened, began flying against the buildings, many of them falling to the earth either crippled or dead. The entire town echoed with fluttering wings. Wolves, driven from their dens and haunts by the prostrating heat, rushed by the fire-fighters in frantic fright. . . Hundreds of jack-rabbits, their long ears flat upon their backs came bounding in from the burning prairie.¹¹

In his novel, The Entering Wedge, Marshall enumerates many birds but discusses or describes them very little.

The meadow lark is referred to by numerous authors. Since this bird is commonly regarded as the state bird, perhaps it may be well to pause and discover what the various writers have to say about it, though it may be noted that none of them refer to it as having any peculiar relation to Kansas.

9. Hinkle, Tawny, pp. 207-208.

10. The Kansan, p. 81.

11. Buell Hampton, pp. 315-316.

Its songs are described as "whistling",¹² "plaintive trill",¹³ and "love-song"¹⁴. Comment is made that the bird ceases to sing in the heat of the summer, as do other birds;¹⁵ and that it is in the habit of lighting on weeds and strong stems of grass to sing.¹⁶

The prairie chicken is mentioned once or twice both as furnishing food for men and as of interest in itself.¹⁷ In the latter reference, allusion is made to its habits when drinking:

A flock of prairie chickens flew down on the pebbly shore on the opposite side at the water's edge. After a brief suspicious pause they began dipping their bills into the water to drink.¹⁸

Sparrows are named by Kansas authors, though in only one case is the species mentioned:

I had English sparrows nesting with me that season who had cousins in town. And what the English sparrow can't find out isn't worth a detective's efforts.¹⁹

The noisy habits of crows are described by one author:

A flock of crows was making a great noise in the woods, just below him. They had discovered an owl, and were trying with all their power to drive him out of the woods before nightfall. The owl flew a little down the woods; the crows with loud, excited cawing followed him. Again they drove him farther down, and finally their caws grew faint in the timber down in the valley.²⁰

Another writer shows the same bird in quite a different mood:

Along the sunny hillslopes crows walked sedately about as if proud of their greenish-black plumage flashing in the morning sun.²¹

12. Clifford Knight, Tommy of the Voices, pp. 30-31.

13. William A. White, A Certain Rich Man, p. 89.

14. William A. White, In the Heart of a Fool, p. 1.

15. Del Munger, The Wind Before the Dawn, p. 102.

16. Hinkle, Tawny, pp. 207-208.

17. Margaret Lynn, Free Soil, pp. 108-109.

18. Tawny, p. 98.

19. Margaret H. McCarter, The Cottonwood's Story, p. 77.

20. Tawny, pp. 96-97.

21. Ibid. p. 199.

Several other birds are mentioned by name, including the mocking-bird, the brown thrush, the redwing blackbird, the bee martins, and the whip-poor-wills; but the references are not of enough importance to quote here. One passage, however, tells of the nature of blue-jays:

Once a blue-jay lighted on a bough above, but even he with his petulant disposition, only looked down for a moment, then silently flew away.²²

Probably the occurrence in nature most interesting to Kansas novelists is what is known as the "Grasshopper Years," the years of 1874 and 1875. Four or five writers in particular give quite long descriptions of the descent and devastation of this plague. These accounts present vivid pictures of the destruction and despair of that time. They are worth noting:

It was a midsummer afternoon. As usual the day was hot. Away to the southwest were banks of clouds, low on the horizon. The clouds were approaching rapidly, close to the earth, rolling in great dense billows. . . No rain clouds had ever approached in such a manner. . . Soon they knew that the clouds were formed of a hungry horde of grasshoppers. As far as the eye could see, great swarms were coming, rolling, tumbling, in great banks, but moving steadily, relentlessly forward. By sheer force of numbers they darkened the sun as clouds before a rain. They remained but a few brief hours, then moved on, leaving in their path destruction such as pioneers had never encountered before. Up and down the valley, and far and wide on every hand, not a living stalk of vegetation was left. Nothing green in sight. Every growing crop was consumed by the ravenous horde.²³

. . . at every settler's house, wondering eyes watched the unheard-of phenomenon, so like, yet so utterly unlike, the sun's eclipse. . . From their height they could see it

22. Tawny, p. 199.

23. The Kansan, p. 98.

sweeping far across the land, not high in the air, but beclouding the prairie like a fog. Only this thing was dry and carried no cool breath with it. Nearer it came, and the sun above looked wanly through it, as surging, whipping, shimmering, with silver splinters of light, roaring with the whir of grating wings, countless millions of grasshoppers filled the earth beneath and the air above. . . Truly, life may be made miserable in many ways, but in the Kansas homes of that memorable year of 1874 life was wretchedly uncomfortable. Out of doors the cloud was a disaster. Nor flood, nor raging wind, nor prairie fire, nor unbroken drought, could claim greater measure of havoc in its wake than this billion-footed creature, an appetite grown measureless, a hunger vitalized and individualized, and endowed with power of motion. No living shred of grass, or weed, or stalk of corn, or straw or stubble or tiniest garden growth; no leaf or bit of tender bark of tree, or shrub, escaped this many-mouthed monster. . . The weed-grown bed of Grass River was swept as if by a prairie fire. . . The cottonwood grees and wild plum bushes belonged to a mid-winter landscape, and of the many young catalpa groves, only stubby sticks stood up. . . For three days the St. Bartholomew of vegetation continued. Then the pest, still hungry, rose and passed to the southeast, leaving behind it, only a honey-combed soil where eggs were deposited for future hatching, and a famine-breeding desolation.²⁴

The sun was completely obscured now and the rapidly moving mass, not unlike snow indeed, was being driven straight toward the north. Whatever it was, it was driving fiercely ahead, as if impelled by a strong wind, though there was not a breath of air stirring below. Soon small objects began to detach themselves from the mass, so that the eye could distinguish separate particles, which looked not unlike scraps of silver driven with terrific force from the tail of some gigantic machine. . . Wherever the light fell it disclosed moving masses of locusts which covered the entire face of the landscape. The teeming cloud of insects was a pest equal to that of the lice of Egypt. They overflowed a Kansas prairie causing every living thing to flee from their path. . . The inroads of numberless scissor-like mouths on a stub of corn near the roadside. The tassel was gone, the edges of the leaves were eaten away, and lines of hungry insects hung to the center rib of each blade, gnawing and cutting at every inch of the stem. . . the ground was dotted all over the patch with small holes where the hungry swarm, not satisfied with the tops, had followed the stems down into the earth, eating out the bulbs to the very taperoots.²⁵

24. McCarter, Winning the Wilderness, pp. 98-100.

25. Munger, The Wind Before the Dawn, pp. 7; 11-12.

The animals, birds, and insects have been discussed so far as important mention of them is made in the Kansas novel. A few other references are made to various other kinds of animals. A few kinds of fish are named: sun-fish,²⁶ and mud-cat²⁷; but the references are not worth repeating here. Snakes, turtles, small insects, such as katydids, chinch-bugs, and fire-flies find place only in passing allusion. The aim has been, in this chapter, not to discuss all the fauna mentioned in the Kansas novel, as that would require great space; but to show in reference and excerpt, the manner in which the authors have brought this phase of Kansas nature into their novels.

26. Emerson, Buell Hampton, p. 73.

27. Ibid.

CHAPTER III
THE FLORA OF KANSAS

In this chapter, the aim shall be to show how the Kansas novelist makes use of the plant life of Kansas.

In the first place, plant life in the Kansas novel, contrary to what was true of the animal life, does not directly concern the lives of the settlers or the plots of the stories. The novelist makes use of it chiefly in a descriptive way; and as far as the plot is concerned, the trees, grass, and flowers, are merely incidental. If any kinds of plant life have an effect on the lives of the characters, they would be the various species of grass, and the sunflowers. The former concerns the characters because of its use as feed for the animals; the latter, for the cheer which they gave to the lonely pioneers. But, as will be pointed out later in the chapter, this use of plant life is not general among novelists.

In descriptions of the plant life of Kansas, the novelist is quite successful. A little later in this discussion, various illustrations of this point will be brought out. In only three cases is any assumption made that any particular plant is peculiar to Kansas. In one of those, the allusion is to the sunflower; in the others, to the goldenrod and the redbud tree. Examples of these instances will be found later in the discussion.

Perhaps it may be because so much of Kansas is prairie and therefore lacking in the abundance of trees found in other states,

but the novelists pay particular attention to those varieties of trees which are found in Kansas. The cottonwood, for example, is mentioned over and over again. The willow, locust, elm, sycamore, oak, crab apple, elder, and walnut, are all named time and time again, as are still others such as the evergreens, the redbud tree, the hickory, the catalpa, and the hackberry. The wild plum, which may be classed rather as a shrub than a tree, finds frequent place in the Kansas novel.

As regards flowers, the most popular with the Kansas authors is, as would be expected, the sunflower. One writer in particular, Emerson, devoted much space to what might be termed a eulogy of this blossom. The goldenrod is also frequently mentioned, and in popularity probably holds second place to the sunflower. Such flowers as asters, wild columbines, Solomon's seal, primrose, everlastings, coneflowers, violets, yucca, and many others are mentioned, if not described at considerable length.

Thus far, the discussion of Kansas plant life in the Kansas novel has been general only. Perhaps it would be well to begin at this point to give some illustrations and specific examples of the statements which have been made thus far in the chapter. In the first part of this detailed discussion, the topic of the trees and shrubs found in the Kansas novel will be treated. After this division of the Kansas flora has been treated, the subject of flowers, herbs, grass, and the like, will be discussed at some length.

To begin with, the cottonwood, as has already been mentioned,

is the tree most often described by the Kansas author. This is probably because the cottonwood is the tree most frequently found along the water-courses of a prairie country. One author, Mrs. McCarter, has even gone so far as to entitle a book, The Cottonwood's Story. This story, which is told in the first person, presumably by a cottonwood tree, deals with the life of that tree and its observance of what passes about it. The tree enumerates in one passage the uses to which the settlers put this type of tree.

For them I sent my children far and wide, and wherever these children took root the early comers knew there was living water. For them the cottonwood was shelter and lumber and firewood and windbreak. For them it was the symbol of vigor and sturdy persistence. For them it coaxed the rain from un pitying skies. It stood up fearlessly in storm or drouth, a thing to weather all changes.¹

In other passages in the same book Mrs. McCarter describes the life and habits of a cottonwood tree:

I loved this place, and, sheltered by the north by that swell of ground, my head above the slope so that all the wide plain was before me, my feet deep in the earth where the unfailing cisterns are, . . . trust a cottonwood to find their secretest hiding-places. . . I flung my bare young branches upward and caught the light and warm sweet air. And when the northeast winds sobbed and wept for the great lakes they missed so much, and when the northwest blizzard curled and uncurled its long whiplashes of fierce, cutting cold; and most of all, when the hot south blasts came singing, singing of the scorched distant plain, I let them all pass by me.²

Only I, the old cottonwood, will bud and blossom and send my drifting, feathery cotton far and wide; will grow green in the springtime and golden in the autumn.³

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1. Pp. 9-10.
 2. Pp. 6-7.
 3. P. 4.

In her other books, Mrs. McCarter describes this tree many times. Nor is she the only Kansas author to do so. For instance, like her, Mr. Ogden describes the appearance and coloring of the cottonwood at various seasons of the year. A few examples will suffice to give an idea of such descriptions.

In the fall:

The woodland along the Neosho was yellow and bronze and purple in the afternoon sunshine. . . Far up the river the shapely old cottonwood stood in the pride of its autumn gold, outlined against a clear, blue sky, while all the prairie lay in seas of golden haze about it.⁴

In the spring:

Along the water-ways the cottonwood's silvery branches, tipped with tender young leaves fluttering in the soft wind, stood up proudly above the scrubby bronze and purple growths hardly yet in bud and leaf.⁵

The next spring when my red blossomy catkins with invisible fingers clung to my branches or lay in little velvety rolls on the brown grasses at my feet.⁶

The wind was moving in the tender leaves of the cottonwood trees along the river, their newly unfolded gloss glittering like bits of enamel as they fluttered and turned toward the sun, with the soothing whispers of gently falling rain.⁷

Tiny leaves which had burst overnight on the cottonwood trees glistened in their unsmirched splendor like bits of bright metal turning in the sun.⁸

Miss Lynn describes the color of the cottonwood's bark as "warm gray-white."⁹

4. McCarter, The Price of the Prairie, p. 322.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 469.

6. McCarter, The Cottonwood's Story, pp. 49-50.

7. Ogden, West of Dodge, p. 65.

8. Ogden, Wasted Salt, p. 86.

9. Free Soil, p. 324.

Cottonwoods are the trees that most frequently grow along the courses of prairie streams. Over and over again this fact is brought out:

There was the river. . . where cottonwoods laced with wild grape-vines made green refreshment for eyes weary of summer heat glimmering over vast prairie lands.¹⁰

Before it lay the endless prairie across which ran the now half-dry, grass-choked stream. A few stunted cottonwoods followed its windings.¹¹

These trees are probably the sturdiest and hardiest of the trees found on the prairie. Mrs. McCarter gives an instance of this:

Some distance down in the crevice of a sharp angle formed by a slight shelf of rock a small clump of cottonwood brush had rooted stubbornly and grown with the sturdy defiance of that heroic tree, the pioneer of the plains.¹²

Though not mentioned so frequently as the cottonwood, the oak tree yet has its share of attention from the Kansas novelists. A few references will be sufficient to show the descriptions given of this tree:

Such a grove of beautiful oaks as you'd never think a flat old prairie could grow. They were tucked away in a little valley where a muddy creek comes winding down to the Solomon River. You could hardly guess, unless you followed the stream, what was hidden in that deep valley. The dip and swell of the prairie showed us only a line of green leafiness until suddenly we were at the gateway of a grove.¹³

Ages ago, dense forests must have covered this region, which some force later reduced to a grass land, and the prairie fires kept it thus. Only this winding creek had crept lovingly about these great oak trees. . . encircling them peninsular fashion shielding them from the flames. . . in years that rolled up centuries, the beautiful trees grew

10. Ogden, The Cow Jerry, p. 5.

11. McCarter, Winning the Wilderness, pp. 22-23.

12. In Old Quivera, pp. 83-84.

13. McCarter, The Peace of the Solomon Valley, pp. 44-45.

and spread their branches. Deep through the black earth they struck strong roots that held firm in the day of the cyclone's wrath. They must be very old.¹⁴

Miss Stephens gives a beautiful description of the redbud tree. This excerpt is one of the few instances in which an author writes of any plant being typical of Kansas.

The legended redbud also marked the year's oncoming tide. I still recall mornings. . . that one of the trees had garmented itself in imperial colors, amid a group of paw-paws and coffee-beans down on the south bank. . . to one red-bud slipping roots in level ground you will find an aspiring ten loving to climb the broken side of a hill. Redbuds bespeak Kansas. That April morning. . . our fascinated eyes saw first the Kaw silvering on our left, and then, on the right, ridges, far and woods near blotched with the purple of the lovely tree.¹⁵

Next to the cottonwood and the oak, the willow ranks in importance among Kansas novelists. Many of the references made to it are too short and of too little significance for the purpose of this thesis to be mentioned here. Like the cottonwood, the willow follows the course of streams, as the succeeding excerpts will show:

In winter the storm pounced with untempered strength upon a land that offered no shelter of forest or wooded brake, except the thin line of cottonwoods and willows along the meandering Arkansas and its feeble, far-spaced tributary streams.¹⁶

The river pushed its way from the purple haze of the distant horizon in the west and flowed slowly down between green fringes of waving willow.¹⁷

Not far down the stream, there grew on this side a long fringe of tall green willows, stretching away into the east where they followed a wide bend in the river.¹⁸

14. McCarter, The Peace of the Solomon Valley, pp. 46-47.

15. Life at Laurel Town, p. 12.

16. Ogden, West of Dodge, p. 2.

17. Hinkle, Tawny, p. 14.

18. Hinkle, Black Storm, p. 134.

And as if waiting, the green willows stood along the river, hushed, pensive, fringing the water far in the west to the Creek of Dixon's, and the Republication River there showed its face of silver.¹⁹

The wild crab is described by one author:

A wild crab lifted its warty trunk. It was a sturdy little fellow; the tree, not so tall, as wild crabs sometimes grow, but making up for its dwarfish stature by a particularly beautiful and symmetrical umbrella of leaves and foliage.²⁰

Dr. Hinkle, in Tawny, twice mentions the elders, contrasting their appearance in different seasons:

The summer days deepened into late August. . . The elders along the river, burdened with dark, ripe berries, leaned low over the stream almost to sweep the surface of the water.²¹

September came. . . The elders along the river, relieved of their burden of fruitage, lifted their heads to await the approach of the long deep sleep.²²

Other trees which are mentioned in the Kansas novel, though not at great length enough to warrant discussion here, are the sycamore, the locust, the catalpa, and the evergreen. With a few remarks and quotations concerning two other trees, the discussion of shrubs will be taken up.

The walnut tree is described by Miss Stephens in Life at Laurel Town:

The most striking figure of the south woods was a black walnut standing with a girth of toward twenty feet--rising in majesty and aloofness so apart from its brothers, and their shade, that the sun had rounded its branches to an almost perfect globe.²³

19. Black Storm, p. 31.

20. Stephens, Life at Laurel Town, pp. 12-13.

21. P. 78.

22. P. 88.

23. PP. 8-9.

Elms are named by several authors, though only a few excerpts are of value to the present discussion:

Like a great green tent the boughs of the elm, just budding into leaf drooped over him.²⁴

The days went slowly by, bringing the long bright autumn beauty to the plains and turning all the elms to gold along the creek at Burlingame.²⁵

The long elm tree, with its spreading branches, grew upon the brink; its gnarled and twisted roots reached far out into the bed that held the placid waters.²⁶

Among the shrubs, the wild plum is most frequently named, though brush is also mentioned. Sumac enters several books, as well:

Down on the level he moved and crowded his way into a miniature forest of sumacs.²⁷

She stopped near the edge of the trees where a dense patch of sumacs grew.²⁸

Pawpaws, buckberry, hackberry, and bitter-sweet are all mentioned in passing in one or more of the Kansas novels; but in none are they dwelt upon or described.

From shrubs to flowers is only a step. As has been stated before in this chapter, the flower most popular with the Kansas novelists is the sunflower. Only one author identifies it with Kansas in any particular way, or mentions that it is the state flower. That author is George W. Emerson, who, in his novel, Buell Hampton, devotes considerable space to describing most enthusiastically this flower.

24. McCarter, Vanguards of the Plains, p. 8.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 354.

26. P. 73.

27. Hinkle, Tawny, p. 98.

28. *Ibid.* p. 99.

"Yes---the sunflower, you know, is the emblem of our state. It grows here in generous profusion, and is certainly as emblematic of plenty for the cattlemen at least, as the seeds of the pomegranate."

As they advanced toward the Cimarron River, the fields of sunflowers became more plentiful, and finally they found themselves in a veritable wilderness of this Kansas emblem. Hundreds of acres stretched away, thickly peopled with these blazing sunworshippers, ever turning and following with their queenly heads the course of the king of day. The darkened multitudes of seeds, like black-eyed Susans, were encircled with bordering crowns of yellowest gold. The gentle wind stirred them into rhythmic melody of motion. Every petal seemed to have caught the sunshine of heaven, and to hold within its gracefully nodding head a warmth of welcome to the visitor. The brown stalks were suggestive of brawny health and strength, while the fan-like leaves presented an unrivaled background to the golden grandeur of a waving sea of yellow.

. . . Then, too, there was a grace in their lithe and willowy undulations expressing a poetry unspoken. . . Mingled with the beauties of this yellow sheen and graceful harmony, there seemed to be a rare independence and stateliness. A music like the rippling of many waters was suggested by the gentle clashing arms and leaves of this wilderness of sunflowers. It was also like an anthem of hope, with liberty as its deathless theme. . . Here amid the stately sunflowers bathed in their celestial beauty, with the radiance of the sun deftly gathered and crystallized into crowns of glory, like hammered gold. . . O gorgeous sunflower, incomparable in thy beauty, unequalled in thy queenliness, surpassing in any stateliness, glorious in thy radiance, emblematic of freedom, liberty, and deathless love of justice. Indeed thou art the worthy emblem of a land of freedom, of a commonwealth asserting and establishing "man's humanity to man." The rose has its beauty and transcendent fragrance, the hyacinth its charm of color, the columbine its mountain freshness, the lily its stateliness of pose, the dandelion its golden warmth, the daisy its modesty, the honeysuckle its twining tendrils of love; but amid all the realm of the flowery kingdom, thou alone hast robbed the sun of his prismatic rays and heaven hath crowned thee with a golden sceptre of everlasting superiority and imperishable majesty.²⁹

Less rapturous are the descriptions and remarks made by the other authors concerning the sunflower; but they convey the importance and significance of this blossom quite as adequately as

does Emerson's flowery rhapsody.

How beautiful they are, those endless bands of gold, drawing us on and on across the plains.³⁰

The subdued tones of evening held all the scene, save where a group of tall sunflowers stood up to catch the last light of day full on their golden shields.³¹

Along either side of it (the trail) was a fringe of spindling sunflower stalks, with their blooms of gold marking two gleaming threads across the plains, far toward the misty nothingness of the eastern horizon.³²

And the sunflowers, covering wide spaces in the valley below nestled thousands of their heads together to spread golden carpets on fields of green.³³

One thinks of the goldenrod in connection with the sunflower, and the Kansas authors describe it also, though not at so great a length as they do the sunflower. One author describes it as being in its "native element"³⁴ in Kansas.

Miss Aplington gives a most appealing description of the sensitive plant, that fragile, fearful flower:

The sensitive briar...is the most interesting plant that grows on the prairie. Its blossoms are soft clustered balls of rose-red stamens, powdered over with grains of golden pollen. The petals are inconspicuous or wanting. But it is not the blossom that makes the plant remarkable. It is sensitive to touch. When the world is dark, it shuts its eyes and sleeps. Its leaflets fold together, palm to palm, as little hands are folded in prayer. The leaf-stem droops heavily against the stalk, as heavy eyelids droop and close. When the daylight comes again, it wakens--unclasps its hands, and lifts up its arms to the sky. But always it is timid and afraid. Its leaves shiver and close at the slightest touch---at the brushing of the meadow lark's wing, even at the trembling of the ground under our horses' feet, as if it feared that we would ruthlessly trample it to earth.³⁵

30. McCarter, Winning the Wilderness, p. 20.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

33. Hinkle, Tawny, p. 88.

34. Ella L. Vale, Between Two Fires, p. 8.

35. Pilgrims of the Plains, pp. 183-184.

We find mention made of such flowers as yellow star grass, blue-eyed grass, sheep sorrel, verbenas, morning-glories, and violets; of buttercups, daisies, sweet williams, and many other blossoms; but these are named only in passing, for, at the most, so briefly, that space will not be given to excerpts concerning them.

Dr. Hinkle describes the everlastings and the aster in one passage from his novel, Black Storm:

The autumn days were now moving swiftly by. A sober haze hung listless over hills and valley, and the last of the summer flowers were fading and drying on hill and plain. The sweet everlastings with their once beautiful pearly flowers, now hung withered and lifeless on the pensive landscape. And as if to bring a last kindly greeting to a passing friend, the golden aster stood living and blooming in the solemn hush on the valley.³⁶

In Tawny, the same author writes of the wild columbine:

Growing in the rocky woodlands, as always at this time of year, along Dixon's were the beautiful red flowers of the wild columbine, nodding from the top of their slender stems in the soft warm breezes of spring.³⁷

Again Hinkle describes several other flowers of the plains:

And again this ancient hill (Old Round Top) looked down on the droning and throbbing of life, for springtime had come and passed into early June. The day was still and warm. Golden flowers of the shooting-star were blooming in the valley; mist-like blooms of the meadow-rue stood as if looking and listening toward the hilltop.³⁸

One author, while not describing the blossoms he names, yet gives an extensive list of flowers to be found in Kansas. The

36. P. 153.

37. P. 199.

38. Black Storm, p. 125.

number and variety is truly surprising:

Not many places in the temperate zone surpass Kansas in its wealth of wild flowers. Delicate in fiber, variegated in color, ambrosial in fragrance, soft and restful to the eye, they are in number almost countless--clematis, evening primrose, blazing star, sweet William, sunflower, poppy, wild rose, painted cup, day flower, blue violet, dandelion, wild lily, phlox, redbud, easter bell, shepherd's purse, oxalis, cleaveus, sedge, rush, blue ivy, anemone, mosses, lichen, canadensis, unbellata, and many others, including over three hundred varieties in all.³⁹

In many of the novels, flowers, while not mentioned by name, are described. A few of these descriptions of the prairie, flower-dotted landscape will give an idea of the love for nature which the ordinary Kansas novelist possesses.

Out beyond the region of long-stemmed grasses, into the short-grass land, we passed across a pathless field-of-the-cloth-of-gold gemmed with myriads of bright blossoms--broad acres on acres that the young years of a coming century should change into great wheat-fields to help fill the granaries of the world. How I reveled in it--that far-stretching plain of flower-starred verdure!⁴⁰

We have outstretching plains of surpassing beauty, speckled with broad fields of ravishing wild flowers, piled tier upon tier, exhaling rarest fragrance.⁴¹

The earth was spread with a carpet of gold spashed with bronze and scarlet and purple, with here and there a shimmer of green showing through the yellow, or streaking the shallow water-ways.⁴²

There are some plants which it is difficult to classify. They might be counted as either flowers or weeds. A few of these are the yucca, dog-fennel, resin-weeds, and prairie-dock. Dr. Hinkle

39. Marshall, The Entering Wedge, pp. 9-10.

40. McCarter, Vanguards of the Plains, p. 69.

41. The Entering Wedge, pp. 9-10.

42. Aplington, Pilgrims of the Plains, pp. 183-184.

described the two latter in his book, Tawny:

July came with. . . the deep yellow blooms of the resinweeds far and near on the level lowlands; with the golden flowers of the prairie dock in bloom above the thick grass.

Again there are some plants which are weeds pure and simple. The loco-weed and jimson weed and such; chickweed, and the obnoxious Russian thistle, "barbed with its thousand thorns"⁴⁴ as Ogden describes it. Cattails, cactus, and sage plants, are neither flowers nor weeds. Dr. Hinkle describes the sage as being "pale gray."⁴⁵

Ferns are mentioned by only a few authors. One novelist describes them as "delicately traced."⁴⁶

Grass of various kinds grows in Kansas: buffalo grass, prairie grass, slough-grass, ordinary grass, are all named in the Kansas novel. Mrs. McCarter describes the buffalo grass:

Level prairie covered with a thick carpet of buffalo grass. Not a stick, not a stone, not a bush, not a tree, not even a clump of weeds on it; nothing but the grayish green mass forming a mat two or three inches deep, with here and there a cactus blossom set like a jewel in the green expanse.⁴⁷

This grass, when cured while still on the stem, made excellent feed as is asserted by several authors. Dr. Hinkle, in his story, Black Storm, a horse, makes special mention of it, as does Evarts in The Shaggy Legion, a story of the buffalo.

Slough-grass is described by Miss Lynn in Free Soil:

44. Ogden, Trail's End, p. 56.

45. Hinkle, Tawny, pp. 63-64.

46. Marshall, The Entering Wedge, p. 245.

47. In Old Quivera, p. 138.

They took Harvey across wide open uplands, where they seemed near to the starlit blue sky, and forded shallow streams in little valleys where the tall coarse slough-grass was dew-soaked.⁴⁸

The south wind smoothed the grass spread before them. Down in the hollows the deeper clough-grass gleamed, as the sun struck its curved glossy blades. Tender untrod green⁴⁹ followed the rise and descent of the gently-moving hills.

A fairly detailed discussion of Kansas plant life as found in Kansas novels has been made in the foregoing pages. If a comparison is made of the use of animal life with that of plant life in the Kansas novel, the final conclusion will be this: that the authors, while treating extensively of plant life, do not attach so much importance to it as affecting the lives of their human characters as they do in their treatment of animal life in the novel. They go into more detailed description of plant life, however, than they do of animal life, being content, in their treatment of the latter, to show besides the ordinary habits of animals, the relation between their actions and the lives of the people with whom they come into contact. As in the preceding chapter, the purpose has been not to discuss all the plants mentioned in the Kansas novel; but to show by various examples and quotations the manner in which the Kansas writers have made use of the plant life of the state.

48 P. 227.

49 P. 33.

CHAPTER IV

ATMOSPHERIC CONDITIONS

In a state subject as Kansas is to certain extremes of climate and to varying weather conditions, it is only natural that the authors should make striking use of atmospheric conditions in that portion of their works devoted to Kansas nature. Not only are beautiful sunsets, dawns, shade, and soft breezes, treated with sympathy and appreciation, but effective treatment is also made of Nature in her angry moods. For instance, the fact that parts of Kansas are subject to tornadoes has been brought into the Kansas novel several times, and has been made in some instances to play an important part in the lives of the characters of the book. Snow storms, hail, thunder storms, and dust, are all described vividly. As will be found in the detailed discussion later, there is sometimes even a melodramatic treatment of storms. Nor is the Kansas novel lacking in the description of clarity of atmosphere or health-giving properties of the air. Even such topics as mirages find a place here and there in the novel; while the subject of moonlight and starlight, cloud-effects, and the rays of the sun are treated at considerable length.

In regard to the influence of atmospheric conditions upon the people in the novels, too much emphasis cannot be laid upon the topic. Rain and drouth, blizzard, hail, and tornado, all have their share in the lives of the inhabitants of a state, whether they be pioneers or dwellers in the later years of settled existence. The beauty of the various atmospheric phenomena also appeals strongly to most people, and this point is

dwelt upon at considerable length by the novelists.

The Kansas author takes evident delight in the Kansas sunset, in the color in the sky caused by dust, in the moonlight, and in all such kindred topics. In the discussion to follow, the subjects just mentioned will be treated first; the topics of storms of all kinds, of winds, being taken up later.

Sunrise is described by several authors with whom this thesis has to deal. The following examples will be sufficient to serve as instances of this.

In Free Soil, Miss Lynn gives several pictures of sunrise:

The pink sky glowed momentarily more roseate. Under it birds waked and soft morning winds bent the grass tops.¹

The first bright sunlight was touching the warmth of the September hills and giving rare color to the hovering mists.²

The thick dark was changing into the thick gray of a cloudy dawn.³

Mrs. McCarter and Miss Aplington also describe the dawn at some length:

The morning was glorious with silvery mists lifting along the river's course and a shimmering light above golden stubble and brown plowed land and level prairie; while far away in all its beauty, hung the deep purple veil that Nature drops between the finite and her infinite, where the things that are seen melt into the things that are not seen.⁴

A filmy curtain hung above the Arkansas River, hiding its level sands and growing shrubbery. Above a curtain of blending purple and scarlet, all the east was one roseate glory shimmering through silvery mist and melting at last far up the sky into an exquisite tracery of mother-of-pearl, until the new-born August day was christened in a sunburst of splendor.⁵

1. P. 216

2. P. 371

3. P. 348

4. McCarter, Winning the Wilderness, pp. 141-142.

5. McCarter, The Corner Stone, pp. 56-57.

"The New Jerusalem hasn't anything over it for coloring. Gates of pearl and foundations garnished with all manner of precious stones and seas of glass mingled with fire."⁶

He came up the slope where the dawn first breaks, and leaned against my trunk and watched the magnificent splendor of the new day swing grandly out of the horizon, and felt the sweet cool breeze that freshens all the slumbering land at waking-time, and heard the musical twittering of the bird-songs.⁷

A softened silvery sun, a pale sweet wraith of itself showed through the veil of mist. The wind came up, the white fog lifted, the sun glowed like a ball of golden fire, and every dewdrop jewel, on every blade of grass, twinkled and trembled and flashed and sparkled, till one could fancy that the plain was bestrewn with diamonds and emeralds and seed-pearls.⁸

Most of the Kansas authors describe the Kansas sunset; over and over, it is pictured for the reader:

"We can appreciate a Corot sunset even if we do have a superior article in the real thing out here."⁹

The sun was slowly fading, the clouds were bathed in purple and gold, the sky-pictures were entrancing.¹⁰

The west grew scarlet, deepened to purple and melted at last into the dull gray twilight that foreruns the darkness of night. One ray of pale gold shimmered far along toward the zenith and lost itself in the upper heavens, and the stars came forth in the blue-black eastern sky.¹¹

...the departing sun throw pictures on the golden sky, which, for delicacy of touch, richness of color, beauty of combination, warmth of expression, could not be approached even by a Turner's brush...the rapid change of cloud and sky under the magic color and fairy shapes of the sun's reflected rays. Now a troop of fleecy forms, flecked with variegated hues, and whitened on the outer edge like a powdered smoke,

6. McCarter, The Corner Stone, pp. 54.
7. McCarter, The Cottonwood's Story, pp. 32-33.
8. Aplington, Pilgrims of the Plains, pp. 224-225.
9. McCarter, The Corner Stone, p. 32.
10. Marshall, The Entering Wedge, pp. 261-262.
11. McCarter, Vanguards of the Plains, p. 215.

float gently as quiet sails on a summer sea, then dissolve into a glowing lake of fire, which is buttressed by circling hills, tipped with gold and mantled with purple, as if angel artists were doing their best work. Then the hills swell and rise and glow, until tier is piled upon tier, and the giant mountains push their peaks into the invisible heights. Now again the kaleidoscope turns, and magnificent cathedrals and monuments appear, glistening with crowns of brilliant diadems, while cherubic forms seem floating about their summits. Then the heavens around are aflame with purple light, as if the retiring sun had projected a thousand waves of fire to check approaching night. Now a dim reddish shadow o'er-spreads the sky, and quietly the great orb of day sinks out of sight.¹²

Perhaps one of the most charming descriptions of sunset is given by Miss Aplington:

The western sky shone bright with glowing color—rose and violet and amethyst and chrysophrase—and like a lovely island in the midst of the sea of light there floated a broken bar of cloud. A last golden glittering beam from below the horizon streamed upward and flung itself across the cloud-mass; and it was no more a lovely island asleep on the bosom of a mystic sea; it had become a glorious city, with towers and groves, and there a great gateway through which marched an army with scarlet banners flying.¹³

Three authors describe stormy sunsets:

The mist lifted and a low red rim to the west under a dark sky promised another hour of light.¹⁴

The low red light gave a strange vividness to the green rain-freshened grass all about them...the blue twilight falling before him and this strange red light on the bright grass.¹⁵

The sun was going down behind a bank of purple cloud.¹⁶

The sun sank into the prairie and tinted the sky all red and green and gold where it shone through the rents in the ragged clouds of purple black.¹⁷

12. Marshall, The Entering WEdge, pp. 246-247.

13. Aplington, Pilgrims of the Plains, p. 252.

14. Lynn, Free Soil, p. 301.

15. Ibid., p. 302.

16. Aplington, Pilgrims of the Plains, p. 250.

17. Wright, That Printer of Udell's, p. 185.

Very closely connected with sunset is the immediate time following, called by some the "afterglow" or "twilight". Many descriptions of this are given. A few will suffice to show the use made of this part of atmospheric phenomena:

The afterglow of sunset was gorgeous in the west. The gray cloud-tide, now a purple sea, was rifted by billows of flame. Level mist-folds of pale violet lay along the prairie distances.¹⁸

...beyond the rim of the valley toward the darkening prairies with the great splendor of the sunset afterglow deepening to richest crimson above the purpling shadows.¹⁹

He looked once more at the west, all a soft purple gray veiled with misty shadows, save over the place where the sun went out, one shaft of deepest rose hue tipped with golden flame was cleaving its way toward the darkening zenith.²⁰

Next to the sunset in order comes the night and the moonlight.

Several authors describe the latter:

...the open prairie, which the great summer moon was flooding with its soft radiance. No other sight is ever so regal as the full moon above the prairie, where no black shadows can checker and blot out and hem in its limitless glory.²¹

The shimmering beams of the silver moon.²²

The silvery prairie and silvery river and mist-wreathed valley, and overhead, the clear, calm sky, where the moon sailed in magnificent grandeur, were a setting to make the evening a perfect one.²³

One author describes the various shapes that the clouds take upon themselves:

...all day long against this very wide field of blue the sky there floated tremendous palaces and ships and strange

18. McCarter, Winning the Wilderness, p. 22.
19. McCarter, Vanguards of the Plains, p. 50.
20. McCarter, A Master's Degree, p. 247.
21. McCarter, The Price of the Prairie, p. 137.
22. Marshall, The Entering Wedge, pp. 9-10.
23. McCarter, A Master's Degree, p. 292.

animals and angels and mansions made of white clouds.²⁴

As is well known, the Kansas climate, particularly in the western part of the state, is considered quite healthful, and patients are sent from eastern states to those sections. The theme of Mrs. McCarter's The Peace of the Solomon Valley, is that of a young man sent from the East to the Solomon Valley, not far from Waconda Springs, in order to be cured of rheumatism. A passage in the book refers to the health-giving properties of Kansas air:

"And you remember what six months in the Solomon Valley did for me? I came home sound as a dollar and never had a twinge of rheumatism since that summer."²⁵

One other author, Emma U. Vaughn, mentions the peculiar qualities of the air of this state:

They say there is something about the place that just takes hold of you. The very air over there is full of life and vigor, and after you have lived there a while you can't be contented anywhere else.²⁶

The milder aspects of Kansas nature have been discussed at some length in the foregoing pages. The Kansas authors are just as vivid and as intensive in their descriptions of Nature in angrier moods.

The type of storm which one thinks of most often in connection with the prairie country is the tornado or cyclone. Several novelists describe this kind of storm at length. Unquestionably the most vivid account is the one given by Knight in Tommy of the Voices:

24. Knight, Tommy of the Voices, p. 42.

25. P. 9.

26. Vaughn, The Cresap Pension, p. 21.

It had become quite dark, a blackness seemed to press down upon the earth. A stillness like death prevailed. ... No air stirred. Nature caught her breath in the face of the impending storm. Suddenly a distant flash of lightning crackled in the blackness and a roll of thunder began only to be brought up short and cease as though it had been choked off by an invisible hand. ...Then the storm broke....

Tommy heard the wind coming out of the southwest; it came with the mighty sound of escaping steam, a gentle pressure at first, but mounting with a rush....

A flash of lightning flamed closer at hand in the blackness, followed by the same short unfinished roll of thunder; the wind bore down with increasing strength; its weight grew from a deep hoarse soughing until it became a screaming thing that whined and shrieked; it seemed almost that it had been caught in its own terrible pressure and was being squeezed until it cried out with pain....

Of a sudden the earth seemed to strike back at the invisible wind and cast it from her as a sleeper throws off his blanket....The blackness of the sky lifted slightly...the blackness that had been all about them sucked into a great twisting, rolling mass as he had seen sticks and leaves drawn into a whirlpool in the river. The twisting mass reared itself until its head reached into the clouds, and all the vast power...was drawn into the whipping tail of it....The rain was beating down upon them.²⁷

Mrs. McCarter also describes a tornado. A fact that lends a melodramatic touch to the account is that a band of Indians is hiding behind Pawnee Rock, ready to attack a wagon train bound for Santa Fe. Through the agency of the storm, this band is destroyed, and the train passes unmolested.

Just before daybreak a huge black cloud came boiling up out of the southwest, with a weird yellow band across the sky before it....The air was motionless and hot above us, the upper heavens were beginning to be threshed across by clouds, and the silence hung like a weight upon us....the hot still air holding its breath against the oncoming tornado....The black cloud swept swiftly onward, with the weird yellow glare

27. Pp. 12-16.

before it...Hotter grew the air and darker the swiftly rolling clouds....Suddenly, an angry wind leaped out of the sky, beating back the hot dead air with gigantic flails of fury. Then the storm broke with tornado rage and cloudburst floods, and in its track terror reigned....This mad blast of the prairie storm was like nothing we had ever heard or seen before. A yellow glare filled the sky, a half-illuminated evil glow, as if to hide what lay behind it. One breathed in fine sand, and tasted the desert dust. Behind it, all copper-green, a broad, lurid band swept up toward the zenith. Under its weird, unearthly light, the prairies and everything upon them, took on a ghastly hue. Then came the inky-black storm cloud---long, funnel-shaped, pendulous---and in its deafening roar and the thick darkness that could be felt, and the awful sweep of its all-engulfing embrace, the senses failed and the very breath of life seemed beaten away. The floods fell in streams, hot, then suddenly cold. And then a fusillade of hail bombarded the flat prairies, defenseless beneath the munitions of the heavens....

Just at the moment when destruction seemed upon us, the long, swinging cloud-funnel lifted. We heard it passing high above us. Then it dropped against the face of old Pawnee Rock, that must have held the trail law through all the centuries of storms that have beaten against its bold, stern front. One tremendous blast, one crashing boom, as if the foundations of the earth were broken loose, and the thing had left us far behind....Daylight burst upon us in a moment, and the blue heavens smiled down on the clean-washed prairies.²⁸

Thunder storms are frequently associated with tornadoes or with wind. Many authors describe thunder storms and rain. Miss Stephens and Charles M. Sheldon give the most vivid accounts, though others are worthy of citation here.

The account written by Sheldon is as follows:

"We have some most tremendous thunder storms here in May and June and they generally come up out of the southwest late in the afternoon very often at seven or eight o'clock. They are terrific."...

A grey line was spreading over the sky clearly defined against the blue. There was no breeze stirring. A moist, muggy heat rose up from the dusty road....

The grey line...had swept up over the sky and covered

28. Vanguards of the Plains, pp. 75-77; 80-82.

the sun and back under the line was a great green-black cloud covering all the southwest heaven, through the green bank intense electric power flashed and a faint breeze stirred the leaves of the boxelder trees....The green black cloud had swept up with astonishing quickness and it was getting dark ...a patter of hail-stones fell around him and before he had reached the little porch big drops of rain spattered over the grass. A warm air touched his cheek...and the trees suddenly bent over and a dull roar came to his ear like the beat of the surf on the old Maine coast...the prairie thunderstorm in all its fury came bounding in from its wide prairie stretches and fell with wild roar...blotting out the sunlight and crashing with all its elemental power over the crouching and terrified town.²⁹

Miss Stephens writes as follows:

A thunder storm had crashed down upon Laurel Town that afternoon. Rain came in sheets. Thunder rolled so continuously that it seemed one vast rumble, now in the zenith, now off on the horizon. And electricity had been so fluidly intense that it fairly balled in red light and shot amid the greenery.

After the storm the air stood in drenched stillness, weary with excessive action. From the land vapors slowly rose and stood enveloping Mount Oread. Birds kept silent. Leaves hung in perpendicular from weight of the waters which had washed them. Mosses stood out, their every feather-tip surfeited.³⁰

Some other writers describe thunderstorms. A few quotations from their works will be given here to show their method of handling this subject.

Mrs. McCarter writes thus:

The silence was broken by a sudden peal of thunder overhead. At the same instant the blackness of midnight lifted itself above the stone ledges and dropped down upon the Corral, smothering everything in darkness. A rushing whirlwind, a lurid blaze of lightning, and a second peal of thunder.... Then the darkness thickened and the storm's fury burst...a mad lashing of bending tree-tops, a blinding whirl of dust

29. Sheldon, Howard Chase, Red Hill, Kansas, pp. 68-70.

30. Life at Laurel Town, pp. 110-111.

filling the air, the thunder's terrific cannonade, the incessant blaze of lightning, the rattling of the distant rain; and above all these, unlike them all, a steady dreadful roaring, coming nearer each moment.³¹

Haldeman-Julius gives this account:

The rain had lessened a little and now the wind began to shake the house, rattle the windows and scream as it tore its way over the plains. The sky flared white and the world lighted up suddenly, as though the sun had been turned on from an electric switch. At the same instant she saw a bolt of lightning strike a young tree by the roadside, heard the sharp click as it hit, and then watched the flash dance about, now on the road, now along the barbed wire fencing. Then the world went black again. And a rumble grew to an earth-shaking blast of thunder. The next bolt broke above the house, and the light it threw showed her the stripling split and lying on the ground. She could hear the rain coming down again, now in rivers. There was unchained wrath in the down-pour, viciousness. It was a madman rushing in to rend and tear. It frothed, and writhed, and spat hatred.³²

Miss Aplington describes this storm:

The air grew suddenly still....A flurry of big splashing raindrops! A swishing watery sound in the air! The bitter smell of wet dust! Then the cloud-roof opened and the deluge came through!...The thunder was a loud-deep-continuous roar, broken by dreadful explosive crashes, that seemed to come simultaneously from the sky above us, the air around us, and the earth beneath our feet.³³

Marshall and Mrs. McCarter give these vivid descriptions of storms:

The sky was a curtain of lurid flame, the thunder reverberated through the air and died away like the sound of distant artillery, the rain poured down in blinding floods ...it was one of those awfully majestic exhibitions of Nature's mighty forces, not uncommon in the early days of Kansas.³⁴

31. McCarter, A Master's Degree, p. 73.

32. Dust, pp. 206-207.

33. Pilgrims of the Plains, pp. 162-163.

34. Marshall, The Entering Wedge, pp. 61-62.

That night Kansas was swept across by the very worst storm that I have known in all these sixty years. It lifted above the town and spared the beautiful oak grove in the bottom lands beside us. Further down it swept the valley clean, and the bluff about the cave had not one shrub on its rough sides. The lightning, too, played strange pranks. The thunderbolts shattered trees and rocks, uprooting the one and rending and tumbling the other in huge masses of debris upon the valley.³⁵

Both dust and hail storms are described by Dr. Hinkle in

Black Storm:

There was a reddish tinge in the air, and the sun, that had been brightly shining, had become dim and almost hidden in a strange darkened veil. The wind that blew almost constantly across the plains had ceased....He saw coming down from the north, a vast, swiftly-moving, reddish-looking cloud ---a cloud as far on either side as the eye could see---one of the worst dust storms in the history of western Kansas was bearing down upon him....Although the late evening sun had been still faintly shining through a veil, the day now suddenly went almost dark and there was a wild, incessant roaring about his ears....And now he heard above the roar of the blinding dust, another sound, a roar that sounded steady, sinister, louder it came and nearer, and nearer, and then the dust storm vanished in a deafening, blinding crash of ten million hailstones beating on the earth, and the night fell black around him....For an hour the hail roared and pelted down, then began to lessen and a cold rain began driving down, moaning and howling through the trees and thickets along the little stream.³⁶

Rain, not specifically accompanied by thunder or any other attendant evils, is mentioned again and again:

During the second week in June the worst rains of a generation began falling in the region of the John McDonald range. For more than two weeks the dreary, leaden clouds hid the sun and the watery heavens opened on the earth. What had been quiet, tinkling brooks in shady ravines suddenly became angry torrents, rushing and surging toward the streams of the Republican and the Smoky Hill which joined here to form the Kaw.

35. McCarter, The Price of the Prairie, p. 130.

26. Pp. 140-145.

Day after day and night after night the rain fell, and day and night came the sounds of the water roaring down through deep cuts in the hillsides, while cracks and lesser streams, bank full, rushed on to pour their swollen torrents into the rapidly rising Kaw.³⁷

The early May rains following that April were such as we had never known in Kansas before. The Neosho became bank-full; then it spread out over the bottom-lands, flooding the wooded valley, creeping up and up towards the bluffs.³⁸

Winter storms of snow and sleet are not uncommon in Kansas or in the Kansas novel. A few excerpts will serve to show the treatment accorded them by the novelists.

For example, Wright has this to say:

Usually in the latitude of Boyd City, the weather remains clear and not very cold until the first of the new year; but this winter was one of the exceptions which are met with in every climate, and the first of December brought zero weather. Indeed, it had been unusually cold for several weeks. Then, to make matters worse, a genuine western blizzard came howling across the prairie, and whistled and screamed about the streets.³⁹

Cretcher and Munger also describe blizzards and snow storms:

The chill of the storm began to creep through the thin walls. One look outside was enough. Huge blasts of wind were hurling down from the frozen regions of the north. It was one of those sudden changes so common on the plains. The rush of clouds totally obscured the sun. The cold was becoming more and more intense. The wind fairly howled a gale. Particles of ice went skimming along with the snow, which was not falling gently, but being driven here and there in great shift-in eddies across the prairie.⁴⁰

...an ominous looking bank of dull grey cloud in the northwest....The wind gave a little twisting flurry, and dropped completely....A few minutes later there was a puff

37. Hinkle, Black Storm, p. 42.

38. McCarter, The Price of the Prairie, pp. 77-78.

39. Wright, That Printer of Udell's, p. 149.

40. Cretcher, The Kansan, p. 92.

of wind from the opposite direction, succeeded by a feeling of a chill...the advance-guard of fine snow began to sift down from the leaden sky above...with a roar the blizzard fell upon him, blotting out the landscape before him as completely as if a curtain had fallen between.⁴¹

Mrs. McCarter describes blizzards several times:

The next afternoon a blizzard came whirling out of the northwest, and twilight settled down in the middle of the afternoon....The snow came in great flapping, swirling sheets, the cold cut like splintered glass, and the wind from every point of the compass beat the earth with the fury of a demon.⁴²

Meantime the wind was at its wildest, and the plains blizzard swirled in blinding bitterness along the prairie... The wind swept in long angry shrieks from the northwest. The snow seemed one dizzy, maddening whirlpool of white flakes hanging forever above the earth.⁴³

Dr. Hinkle in several passages recounts a very severe winter during which the hero of his story, a dog, has to live in the open:

One of the worst winters in the history of Kansas struck in early December of that year. The cold of the past was as nothing to this. Day after day and night after night its rushing blasts swept over hill and plain. It hurled down from its storm-clouds a vast, deep blanket of snow, filling many ravines to a dangerous depth; it froze every swale and creek; it howled like demons through the naked woods, and reached out with icy fingers to clutch and kill every wild thing without food or shelter....For a week it snowed every night. Then the snow ceased, but the leaden clouds hung low, and the north wind hissed and howled across desolate frozen wastes, and in the woods it dropped to a low, moaning sound, as it swung and creaked the frozen boughs.⁴⁴

The temperature dropped to 36 degrees below zero, where it hung quite steadily, rising slightly about noon, but again dropping swiftly as the night settled down. It was a winter never to be forgotten, with its short, dark days, and incredibly numerous howling blizzards.⁴⁵

41. Munger, The Wind Before the Dawn, p. 359.

42. The Cottonwood's Story, pp. 25-26.

43. Winning the Wilderness, p. 125.

44. Tawny, p. 135.

45. Ibid. p. 138.

Other references which might be given are many. Two more will be sufficient here to show the writers' treatment of Nature in her winter mood.

Miss Lynn writes:

No one had expected such cold weather as this. The last winter, the first one for the most of the colony, had been warm and charming all through, and settlers had ardently congratulated themselves on their choice of climate....Tents and unfinished buildings proved only paper barriers to the icy prairie wind.⁴⁶

Mrs. McCarter also describes a winter of hardship:

The fury of the storm increased. Out in the open country it hammered mercilessly on the flat, resistless, grassy plains. It wrenched in wrath at every tree and shrub. It screamed in anger down every open draw and shaded ravine. It hurles its violent rage upon every human habitation, and the shelter built by human hands for dumb animals.⁴⁷

So far, wind, except in connection with tornadoes, thunder storms, and blizzards, has not been mentioned; and yet it was one of the most important factors in the lives of the settlers. The constant, monotonous winds have done more to unsettle the minds and unstring the nerves of lonely pioneer women than most of the other hardships of their lives. It is the Kansas wind which has helped to fill the asylums of the state. One author has written of the winds as "those monotonous, unresting winds".⁴⁸ Why the settler should feel so about them is well told in the following passages from Mrs. McCarter's Winning the Wilderness:

The next day, and for many days following, the wind blew; fiercely and unceasingly it blew, carrying every movable thing before it. Whatever was tending in its direction, it helped over the ground amazingly. Whatever tried to move in the face

46. Free Soil, p. 97.

47. A Wall of Men, p. 167.

48. Cowgill, Over the Border, (Kansas Farmer, April 14.)

of it had to fight for every inch of the way. It whipped all the gold from the sunflowers and thrashed them mercilessly about. It snapped the slender stems of the big, bulgy-headed tumbleweeds, and sent them tumbling over and over, mile after mile, until they were caught at last in some draw, like helpless living things, to swell the heap for some prairie fire to feed upon. It lifted the sand from the river bed and swept it in a prairie simoon up the slope, wrapping the little cabin in a cloud of gritty dust. The cottonwoods along the waterway moaned as if in pain and flung up their arms in feeble protest. The wild plum bushes in the draw were almost buried by the wind-borne drift smothering the narrow crevice, while out on the plains the long lashing waves of bending grass made the eyes burn with weariness. And the sun watched it all with unpitying stare, and the September heat was maddening.⁴⁹

The Kansas writers dwell especially upon the hot winds of the state. Over and over again, these winds and their effects upon the settlers' lives are described.

All lovely was this springtime of 1874. Midsummer had another story to tell. A story of a wrathful sun in a rainless sky above a parched land, swept for days together by the searing south winds.⁵⁰

The never-ceasing south wind had begun to blow harder, coming hot and shriveling from the gates of whatever inferno bred it to blast and torture the Kansas plains....Wild flowers by the roadside hung despondently, the gray bunch grass stood sere and brittle....The refreshing rills which had sparkled down the old buffalo trails a few weeks earlier, promising water in abundance, had dried up to the last drop; their hard-baked beds were cracked.⁵¹

Then came the burning drought, day after day, when clouds banked high but no rain came; days of hot winds, stifling dust, withering cornfields and gardens.⁵²

Mrs. Murphy, in Lois Morton's Investment, describes the effect of the summer wind upon corn:

49. McCarter, Winning the Wilderness, p. 30.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

51. Ogden, West of Dodge, p. 223.

52. Cretcher, The Kansan, pp. 97-98.

The rain ceased with the coming of the hot July days. During the day the leaves of the corn would roll up and look so thirsty for rain, but the cool nights would refresh it, although no dew was anywhere perceptible, and the morning would find it erect, again flinging to the prairie breeze its glistening green banners.

Then came a day when the wind blew strongly from the south all day....Nor did the wind go down with the coming of evening as usual. All night long it swept the plains....The morning found the wind still blowing. As the sun rose higher and higher in the eastern sky, his beams seemed to heat it until it felt like a blast from an oven...next morning the poor corn no longer unrolled its banners bravely- they were parched and dried till they crumbled at the slightest touch.⁵³

Emerson, Haldeman-Julius, and Ogden all describe the effect of the wind upon people, in both a temporary and a permanent way:

The hot wind began blowing a regular gale....As the day advanced the wind became hotter and hotter...a few minutes' exposure would blister the face and hands of the hardiest farmer.⁵⁴

Kansas wind, Kansas well-water and Kansas sun had played their usual havoc, giving her skin the dull sand color so common in the Sunflower State.⁵⁵

It was so hot already, the ceaseless day wind blowing as if it trailed across a fire, that one felt shivers of heat go over the skin; so hot that the heat was bitter to the taste, and shade was only an aggravation.⁵⁶

The sun came out as hot as before, the withering wind blew from the wouthwest plaguing and distorting the fancy of men.⁵⁷

Mrs. McCarter writes of the part which the wind had in creating a "blow-out"; that is, a tract of drifting sand:

"A blow-out is never satisfied until it has swallowed all the land in the landscape...A few years ago there was just a sandy outcrop along a little draw...the line of some prehis-

53. Pp. 186-187.

54. Emerson, Buell Hampton, pp. 246-247.

55. Haldeman-Julius, Dust, p. 145.

56. Ogden, Trail's End, p. 245.

57. Ibid., p. 277.

toric river-bed, I suppose....Something started the sand to drifting. It increased as the wind blew away the soil; the more wind, the more sand; the more sand the more wind. They worked together until what had been a narrow belt spread enormously...making acres of waste ground.⁵⁸

Thus far, wind has been discussed only as a disagreeable part of the nature of Kansas. Lest the reader be under the misapprehension that that is the only way in which the Kansas novelist treats wind, a few passages will be quoted here to show that the wind may be of pleasure to the inhabitants of the state.

White has this to say about the subject:

The wind blew through the gaunt branches of the cotton-wood trees in the yard, and far down in the valley came the moaning as of many waters, and the wind played its harmonies in the woodlot.⁵⁹

Miss Lynn mentions wind as a pleasant part of nature, as do

Mrs. McCarter and Emerson:

Then as the charm of a distant wood called his New England eye, he turned southward toward it, free of purpose, as the wind that blew in his face. The prairie wind was in itself a companion and a constant invitation to him. No other element of the new country seemed so life-stimulating as this very breath of it, whether he journeyed lightly with it or met its fresh greeting as he rode.⁶⁰

There is something soothing and healing in the breezes that sweep up the Sage Brush on summer evenings.⁶¹

On the fifth morning at daybreak the cool breeze that sweeps the prairies in the early dawn flowed caressingly along the Grass River valley.⁶²

As they turned to view the long low swell of land to the northward, a cool wind came sweeping over its crest, bringing the vigor of refreshing in its caress.⁶³

58. McCarter, The Reclaimers, pp. 88-89.

59. White, In the Heart of a Fool, pp. 155-156.

60. Lynn, Free Soil, p. 55.

61. McCarter, The Reclaimers, p. 146.

62. McCarter, Winning the Wilderness, p. 97.

63. McCarter, The Corner Stone, p. 57.

The cool breezes from the far-away foothills came gently down gladdening the landscape with their refreshing breath.⁶⁴

Only one author, Mrs. McCarter, mentions the subject of mirages.

Two such quotations will serve to show the descriptions of this phenomena:

The day was very hot, with the scorching breeze of the plains that sears the eyeballs dry. Through the heat and the glare we pressed on over long, white monotonous miles...ahead of us ran the taunting mirage---cool, sparkling water rippling between green banks---receding as we approached.⁶⁵

Suddenly lifting her eyes she saw far across a stretch of burned prairie a landscape of exquisite beauty. In the foreground lay a little lake surrounded by grassy banks and behind it, on a slight elevation, stood a mansion house of the old Colonial style with white pillared portico, and green vines and forest trees casting cool shade. Beyond it, wrapped in mist, rose a mountain height with a road winding picturesquely in and out along its side...."It's only the mirage."⁶⁶

The excerpts and passages quoted in the preceding pages will show something of the way in which the Kansas novelists treat the subject of atmospheric conditions in their novels. As can readily be seen from the discussion made, the authors of this state consider atmospheric phenomena of great importance; of so great import, indeed, that they discuss it in its relation to their characters very often. Probably it, more than any other phase of nature, more closely concerns and is more bound up with the lives of the people of the state. Animals and plants, play a large part in the lives of the settlers; but the weather---storms, wind, drouth, warmth, and cold---affect people more than all other phases of nature.

64. Emerson, Buell Hampton, p. 237.

65. McCarter, Vanguards of the Plains, pp. 296-297.

66. McCarter, Winning the Wilderness, p. 119.

CHAPTER V
THE SEASONS

Unlike the treatment of the various topics discussed in the preceding chapters, the description of the seasons by the Kansas authors is not particularly striking or original. The fact is that the seasons have been described so often by authors of all states and countries, that there is little new that can be said. Authors from very early times have expatiated upon the heat of summer, the cold of winter, and the delights of spring and Indian summer. The Kansas novelists have followed their example in writing of the delights and the discomforts of the various seasons; but they have not contributed anything essentially new to the literature on the seasons.

As might be expected, spring is a favorite topic with the Kansas novelists. Almost without exception, their treatment of it is dwelling upon the soft air, the pleasant sun, the songs of birds, the budding of trees and flowers, and all the other manifestations that go to make up the springtime whether in Kansas or in other states or countries. A few illustrations will serve to show the terms which the novelists employ in the descriptions.

Miss Stephens, in several passages in the novel, Life at Laurel Town, describes the springtime:

. . .a Kansas spring was burgeoning---the verdure of April, indescribably luscious May days, June air fragrant with wild grape blossoms and musical with stir of leaves.

Than the coming of spring in Kansas nothing can be more beautiful. Winds do blow over rolling lands. Even in February, as if conscious of a mighty secret they purpose later to reveal, they begin a hollow murmur. . . Not all days are calm.

Neither are all days warm. Frosts dart from upper airs.

But tree trunks brighten, and the onward push of beauty is so superb---color in sky and budding things; the very soil gleams back at you---there is no telling in words.

All leading to May---to the earth inwrought with violets, flowering star-grasses, mandrake, yellow blossoms of the oxalis, native blue phlox. And above this carpet from the Eternal's loom, tree and shrub leafed in rose velvet or fresh green, thrushes fluting, mourning dove lamenting passion to mate and the meadow-lark.

"Scattering his loose notes in the waste of air."

With June ahead! . . . a heaven of sapphire-blue, on-spurring fruits of an ambition, up-sending soil and their message for the furthering of man; standing from dawn to that veiling hour when gray sphinx-moth and ruby-throated humming-bird search their supper in the cup of the trumpet-flower.

These closings of the day, at times, especially in May and June, forerun by rainbows, we often gathered, like a group of Parsees, to watch the sky's tumbling, tumultuary vapors---billows crimson, golden, amethyst, sea-green, and soft greys, shading to black; or a gleaming globe, unattended by cloud seraphim, sinking in solitary splendor behind the western hills.¹

Cooper, in his novel, The Last Frontier, also describes the spring:

Spring was here; the carpeting of the plains were soft with the early breaking of wild flowers, raising their jeweled heads for a few fragrant weeks before the scorching heat should cut them down again; the wild grass was springing up in the valleys, and the buffalo runs were becoming deepcut again with the sharp hoofs of the thousands heading northward from the shelter of the winter months.²

1. pp. 9-11.

2. P. 118.

Mrs. McCarter and William Allen White also write of this season of the year:

May came in its appointed time. In Kansas, the month of wild roses, and odorous verbenas; the month of deep blue skies, and snow-white, silken-soft cumulus clouds; the month of balmy air, or golden noontides, and crystal-clear, star-gemmed nights; the month of bird's song and sweet-voiced zephyrs; the month of growing things ---the mother-month of all exquisite loveliness.³

It was an April day in the Walnut Valley, with all the freshness of the earth just washed and perfumed by April showers. The sunshine was pale gold. There was a gray-green filmy light from budding trees, and the old-time miracle of the grass was wrought out once more before the eyes of men. The orchards along the Walnut were faintly pink, and the eggs in the robin's nest, the south winds purring through the wooded spaces; the odor of far-plowed furrows on the prairie farms, all gave assurance of the year's gladdest days.⁴

It had been one of those warm days when spring is just coming into the world. All day the boy had been roaming the wide prairies. The voices of the wind in the brown grass and in the bare trees by the creek had found their way into his soul. . . Out there, looking eastward over the prairies checked in brown earth, and green wheat, and old grass faded from russet to lavender, with the grey woods worming their way through the valleys.⁵

One author mentions the well-known fact that the Kansas climate is subject to sudden change from hot to cold and vice versa:

Probably in no place in the world is the weather subject to such swift and striking changes as in Kansas. . . It sometimes happens that winter, with the most astonishing suddenness, melts into warm spring. This latter was what had happened during the middle of this March. . . He opened the door of his cabin. . . to feel a warm south wind blowing in

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3. McCarter, A Wall of Men, p. 305.
 4. McCarter, A Master's Degree, p. 144.
 5. White, In the Heart of a Fool, p. 450.

his face. Water was dripping from the roof of his cabin; the snow had begun melting an hour before day-light.⁶

Another author compares the Kansas spring with that of New England:

Ellen's eyes, used to sharply-outlined New England, followed the soft rise and fall of the hills and noted the deepening of green where one slope gently met another. The tender spring green warm and gold-touched in the sunlight, was not a color but life itself.⁷

In the Kansas summer, contrary to what was true of the springtime, there is much that the novelists cannot delight in. For every description showing enjoyment of the Kansas summer, there are two dwelling on drouth, heat, and discomfort. The following quotations will serve as accounts of the discomforts of the season:

The heat of a July day beat pitilessly down on the scorching plains. The weary trail stretched endlessly on toward a somewhere in the yellow distance that meant shelter and safety. Spiral gusts of air gathering out of the low hills to the southeast picked up great cones of dust and whirled them zigzagging across the brown barren face of the land. Every draw was bone dry; even the greener growths along their sheletered sides, where the last moisture hides itself, wore a sickly fallow hue.⁸

. . .the west where the hot air quivered between the iron earth and a sky of brass.⁹

Not a cloud had yet scarred the heavens, not a dewdrop had glistened in the morning sunlight. Clearly, August was out-ranking July as king of a season of glaring light and withering heat.¹⁰

. . .the blaze of sun which soon must break upon them for a parching season again. The dust lay deep under the feet, gray on their roofs where shingles curled like autumn leaves in the sun.¹¹

6. Hinkle, Tawny, p. 184.

7. Lynn, Free Soil, pp. 33-34.

8. McCarter, The Reclaimers, pp. 130-131.

9. McCarter, Winning the Wilderness, p. 96.

10. Ibid., p. 93.

11. Ogden, Trail's End, pp. 275-276.

He had been through some hot and dry spells in the Arkansas Valley, but never one as dry and hot as this.¹²

Cooper, Knight, Haldeman-Julius, and several others all mention summer:

A blazing sun of early August beat glaring, mercilessly down through the clear atmosphere of western Kansas, upon parched ground, the gray-blue stretches of sagebrush, the dry arroyas of sandy-bedded streams.¹³

There was no happiness in those fields when burned by the August winds, the soil breaking into cakes that left crevices which seemed to groan for water. That sky with its clouds that gave no rain was a hard sky.¹⁴

Only once before in her memory had there been such a summer and such a drought. The corn leaves burned to a crisp brown, the ground cracked and broke into cakes and dust piled high in thick velvety folds on weeds and grass.¹⁵

The summer passed with its long hot days, and its sultry nights when sleep was out of the question until the early morning hours after the heated earth had cooled somewhat.¹⁶

. . . those long hot miles, while the June sun rose higher and the grass-blades seemed to pulsate before his eyes in the heat-waves touching them.¹⁷

Then came the burning drought, day after day when clouds banked high but no rain came; days of hot winds, stifling dust, withering cornfields and gardens. . . Even the sturdy sunflowers by the roadside surrendered and stood disconsolate with golden heads drooping. Only along the lowlands in the creek bottom was there green vegetation.¹⁸

A few writers seem to have found pleasure in summer in Kansas. A few quotations will be sufficient to show their thoughts:

June came---June and the soft night wind, and the warm stars; June with its new deep foliage and its fragrant grass and trees and flowers; June with a mocking bird singing through the night to its brooding mate.¹⁹

12. Ogden, Trail's End, pp. 275-276.
13. Cooper, The Last Frontier, p. 200.
14. Haldeman-Julius, Dust, p. 46.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
16. Murphy, Lois Morton's Investment, p. 127.
17. Lynn, Free Soil, p. 229.
18. Gretcher, The Kansan, pp. 97-98.
19. White, In the Heart of a Fool, p. 209;

It was nearing the last days of June. The cool night breeze, so exhilarating in the southwest, died away each morning as the dawn streaked the east, and the sun climbed above the horizon. The limitless sky bent above the earth in silence and grandeur. No breath of air stirred leaf, or flower, or grass-blade. It was one of a hundred such quiet, perfect days, on any one of which you might have searched the heavens from horizon to horizon and found neither cloud nor the semblance of one.²⁰

The way was pleasant, for Nature had blessed the valley with all the beauty of a wild rich land, where even in late midsummer the grasses grow lush and green, and a thousand golden blossoms bent before the soft rippling breezes that poured over them like the waves of an invisible sea.²¹

The gracious beauty of this August dawn, the soft, cool airs of the summer morning. . .; the beauty of dew-diamonded grasses, and rainbow-tinted waves of prairie verdure, green and orange yellow, shimmering in the golden glory of the new-born day; the soft coo of birds astir.²²

The treatment of autumn in the Kansas novel is similar to that of spring. Only a few instances may be found where the fall is described as too cold or stormy for the deepest enjoyment. A few excerpts will suffice to illustrate this point.

Cretcher and Knight mention autumn several times. The following quotations will serve to show the purpose here:

It was not autumn. The first frosts had changed the vivid green of the prairie grass to dull brown, and placed the purple blush upon the ripened prickly pears. Wild sunflowers dropped mournfully, their blossoms loaded with seed. The wild fowl were again in the land on their annual pilgrimage to warmer climes.²³

20. Emerson, Buell Hampton, p. 242.

21. McCarter, In Old Quivera, pp. 110-111.

22. McCarter, The Wall of Men, p. 421.

23. Cretcher, The Kansan, p. 31.

There came a morning in early fall when the leaves were beginning to turn and a few of the more venturesome of them were already riding the winds. The niggerhead daisies had vanished from the fields; the birds, except for the sparrows and the crows were gone; and the winds that now were blowing came not from No Man's Land, but from the slate-colored north. The dust was no longer deep in the roads, the rains had come and gone, leaving them filled with hard dry clods. ²⁴

Mrs. McCarter writes of autumn many times in her books:

All this because it was mid-October, a heaven-made autumn day in Kansas, with its gracious warmth and bracing breath; with the Indian summer haze in shimmering amethyst and gold overhanging the land; and the Walnut Valley, gorgeous in the glow of the October frost-fires, winding from between broad seas of rainbow radiant prairies. ²⁵

October came again to Kansas with all the beauty of autumn skies and rainbow-tinted prairies. The Vinland Valley swam in the heliotrope haze. The Wakarusa went on its winding way to meet the Kaw. The woods along the shallow draws were purple and scarlet. The breeze, exhilarating as wine, swept in from the far sunny plains. ²⁶

William Allen White points out the effect of autumn upon

a boy:

. . .but the most beautiful things he sees as the old year winds the passing panorama of life for his eyes is the sunshine and prairie grass. . .where the frosty breath of autumn has turned the grass to lavender and pale heliotrope, and the hills roll away like silent music and the clouds idling lazily over the hillsides afar off cast dark shadows that drift in the lavender sea. Now the smoke that the old year paints upon the blue prairie sky will fade as the year passess. . . but the music in the boy's heart, put there by the passing year, and the glory of the sunshine and the prairie grass with the meadow-lark's sad evening song as it quivers for a moment in the ²⁷ sunset air---these have been caught in the child's soul.

24. Knight, Tommy of the Voices, pp. 68-69.

25. A Master's Degree, p. 40.

26. A Wall of Men, pp. 491-492.

27. In the Heart of a Fool, pp. 159-160.

Now and again the writers speak of autumn as being not entirely pleasant and beautiful:

One of those dripping, chilly, wet days our Kansas October sometimes mixes in with their opal-hued hours of Indian Summer.²⁸

In Kansas no rain had fallen for months, except a few tantalizing drops that sizzled and left scarcely a pellet of mud on the parched ground. The Vinland Valley was a barren waste, save for the little growths that had struggled through the season in the most sheltered nooks of the ravines. The terrible drouth that fell upon the West from the midsummer of 1859 until November of 1860 seemed the final test of the freedom-loving pioneers.²⁹

The treatment of winter is about equally divided between the pleasant and the unpleasant. While the bitter cold and the heavy snow and storms are stressed in many passages, the beauty of the winter landscape finds a place, also.

The following examples will serve to illustrate the treatment of winter as a season of pleasant weather:

It was mild afternoon, with no hint of winter, nor Christmas glitter of ice and snow about it. Just a glorious finishing of an idyllic Kansas autumn rounding out in the beauty of a sunshiny mid-December day.³⁰

Like ocean tides sweeping in from illimitable, watery spaces which no man can measure, the bleak December winds swept the open Kansas plains. And although the uplands were colorless and the Vinland Valley was only a waste of dead grasses with a black tracery of leafless boughs along its sheltered waterways, the shining, silvery heavens were never so glorious, nor did purple dawn and scarlet sunset lose one unit of their splendor.³¹

. . . a yellow road as yet unpacked by snows or deep freezes; winter had been loath to assert itself this year.

28. McCarter, The Price of the Prairie, p. 301.

29. McCarter, A Wall of Men, p. 397.

30. McCarter, A Master's Degree, p. 233.

31. A Wall of Men, p. 117.

Rather the day was one of warm coolness. . . dry powdery dust which matched with the yellowness of the plains all about, the parched appearance of the deadened grass, the unrelieved spaces of the slight rises in the distance.³²

Miss Lynn and Mrs. McCarter both describe snow scenes:

Where smooth unbroken stretches of green had lain in the summer, now lay stretches of white as smooth and unbroken. In the summer they had thought the sky as blue as sky could be, but now it seemed even bluer, curving over the spaces of snow.³³

The snow was deep in the wooded spaces. Out on the bluff by the fallen log the ground was swept bare. They reined in at the shelter of the evergreens and looked out over the valley, full of a cold sunset light. A typical winter snow scene was before them, pale and dainty in its coloring, with faint touches of heliotrope and silver here and there, accented by the fine ebony tracing along the ravines, while the pallid sky above was sloping down to scarlet and purple in the cold west.³⁴

Upon the main trail the snow that had fallen after midnight deepened in the lower places as the wind whirled it from the prairie swells. . . But the open plains were bitterly cold and the wind grew fiercer as the hours passed. . . And so, cold and alone in a white cruelty of solitary land bounded only by the gray cruelty of the sky, with a dimming trail before her under a deeper snowfall, and with long miles behind her, she struggled on.³⁵

In the foregoing pages it has thus been demonstrated that the Kansas authors have nothing really new to write of the seasons. One could go on quoting for a considerable space the descriptions of winter, summer, spring, and fall; but such descriptions would be similar in thought, if not in phrasing, to those which have been used here as examples. But those given will suffice as illustrations, without running the risk of being tedious to the reader.

32. Cooper, The Last Frontier, p. 1.

33. Lynn, Free Soil, p. 107.

34. McCarter, A Wall of Men, p. 216.

35. McCarter, Winning the Wilderness, pp. 54-55.

CHAPTER VI

LANDSCAPE AND TOPOGRAPHY

The usual landscape found in Kansas is one of rolling plains, of almost treeless stretches of grassy country, broken here and there by a meandering river full of sandbars and silt. A good deal is made of the extent of the view, which stretches out before the spectator for miles.

In a few instances, however, the Kansas novelist mentions such objects in the landscape as sand dunes, outcroppings of rock, canyons, caves, and hills, features in the state hardly expected by those who think of Kansas as all prairie. One author describes at considerable length that strange phenomenon, Waconda, that salty pool of immeasurable depth, rising and falling like the ocean tides. Several mention Pawnee Rock, an object the more curious because of the fact that nowhere else near it can be found rock, and because of its significance to early travelers across the plains. The Kansas authors write of the Kansas rivers in all stages, from the sluggish, drouth-shrunk stream of summer, to the raging torrent of spring. Now and then, one finds mention of coal mines, or oil or gas wells. Several kinds of rock are written of in the Kansas novel, though none is treated at any great length. One author, Marshall, gives his conclusions regarding the formation of the prairies in the aeons long past. All in all, the Kansas author describes the landscape and topography of the state at considerable length.

It is well at this point to give a few illustrations of the various features mentioned above. In the order named, the topics taken

up will concern the rolling prairie contours, the hills, the streams and canyons, Waconia, and other such subjects.

Knight gives two excellent descriptions of the prairie in his novel, Tommy of the Voices:

Tommy was fortunate in being born on the prairies; there were no mountains tumbled about him to shut out the horizon and narrow his world to a mere valley, there was no sea with its eternal line of beach to split his world in half; whichever way he looked the earth kept on and on until it touched the sky, no matter how far he walked he never could see that he had approached an inch nearer to the sky's edge. There are those of little vision who have called the prairies monotonous, but that is because their minds have been cramped by the cities or the valleys they have lived in; the wide sky is not in their souls; the far horizons are beyond the reach of their myopic eyes. It was the breadth of expectation in Tommy, engendered by the prairies, that led him to look forward to the future with confidence that it held vast possibilities for him.¹

. . . He saw a great wide stretch of level plain, a clean-shaved cheek of earth, all tanned and sunburned with exposure. It ran clear away to the west for miles and miles and miles.²

Miss Aplington also describes the prairie outlines:

This is no monotonously level plain, stretching away drearily into interminable distance. The contour of the country is beautifully diversified, with hills, not steep valleys, not wide, little rivers, not deep, and groves, not big enough to get lost in, but big enough to afford a grateful shade for our noonday rest.³

Other writers besides Knight and Aplington mention the prairie stretches. The following excerpts will serve to show their method of procedure:

There was not a ravine, not a hill. The land spread away there toward the east as level as if the sea which

1. Pp. 88-89.
2. P. 23.
3. Pilgrims of the Plains, p. 158.

once covered it had drained off only a little while ago, such a little while, indeed, that the grass had not got much of a start.⁴

A Kansas prairie is a veritable inland sea. From Meade to the northwest a broad expanse of buffalo grass lands stretched away for many miles, almost as level as the top of a table, without even a single gully or rill to break its tiresome monotony.⁵

It was now early summer. From their very dooryard the unbroken prairie stretched away for miles and miles, a carpet of vivid green.⁶

Straight to the west there was wide open plain that lay for two miles, slightly broken here and there by rolling ground, between which were small gulches and draws.⁷

. . .the unlimited open, and the world of untouched grass, and the soft airy silence.⁸

In several of her books, Mrs. McCarter describes the landscape in such typical passages as follow:

The broad green prairies of the West roll back in huge billows from the Missouri bluffs, and ripple gently on, to melt at last into the level grassy plains sloping away to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.⁹

. . .the long, gray, waterless lands of the Cimarron country. Here we journeyed along monotonous levels that rose and fell unnoted because of lack of landmarks to measure by.¹⁰

The shapes of things differ. Instead of the churned-up ridges and rugged timber-decked lands of Pennsylvania and York State, the Creator of scenery chose to pour out this land mainly a smooth and level and treeless prairie—like chocolate on the top of a layer cake.¹¹

4. Ogden, Short Grass, p. 239.
5. Emerson, Buell Hampton, p. 309.
6. Cretcher, The Kansan, pp. 24-25.
7. Hinkle, Black Storm, p. 84.
8. Lynn, The Land of Promise, p. 21.
9. Vanguards of the Plains, p. 36.
10. Ibid., p. 195.
11. The Reclaimers, pp. 208-209.

In contrast to the descriptions of level or rolling prairies, one finds such pictures as the following:

. . .no anything but a spread of young grass over the top and sides of the hill. . .On one hill she could look away off into a blue valley, through which the forded stream ran; but on the other, behind her, rolled hills like this one.¹²

Beyond a westward sweeping curve of the river's course the chase became a climb up a long slope that grew steeper and steeper, cutting off the view of the stream.¹³

Their trail grew narrower and more secluded, winding up a steep hill between high banks. Half way up, where the road made a sharp turn, a break in the side next to the creek opened a rough way down to the water.¹⁴

The canyons deepened and the whole region was bewildering, but still we struggled on. . .the soft yellow bluffs of bone dry earth reached down to the dry beds of one-time streams. . .a little opening, ridged in on either side by high, brown bluffs.¹⁵

Peace reigned this morning on the upper reaches of the highlands and on the river valley that nestled snugly between long ranges of high, rock-rimmed hills.¹⁶

At the end of another mile the plain dipped sharply and two low ravines loomed ahead, beyond which lay a long line of bluffs and ridges.¹⁷

Numerous passages suggest that not all of the state is made up of soft gentle contours or wide, sweeping vistas of level land. Note, for example, the following from the pen of Ogden:

Toward the south the land began to rise in the swells that became broken country near the river, but it was considerable distance to the first rise big enough to hide a horse.¹⁸

12. Lynn, The Land of Promise, pp. 18-19.

13. McCarter, Winning the Wilderness, p. 40.

14. Ibid., p. 178.

15. McCarter, Vanguards of the Plains, pp. 341-342.

16. Hinkle, Tawny, p. 14.

17. Hinkle, Black Storm, p. 85.

18. Ogden, Short Grass, pp. 239-240.

One sometimes reads of canyons and gulches, especially in the novels of Dr. Hinkle. In the wild country which he describes in the following passages, his animal heroes find a home and refuge from pursuers:

This gorge with its high frowning cliffs, treacherous slimy rocks, dangerous, precipitous clay banks that in places dropped sheer one hundred feet, and fell away from the tall grasses above, where there was no warning, unless one knew the place---this Cutter Gorge was treacherous. At the foot of these yawning spaces lay jagged rocks along the margin of the ever restless stream coursing along the bottom.¹⁹

Somewhere in the Cutter Gorge, with its east side of high, frowning cliffs, treacherous clay banks, and dangerous steeps covered with jumbles of slimy rocks.²⁰

Pocket Gulch. . .the high precipitous wall that blocked him completely. A thin stream of water was pouring down over the cliff, making a low roaring sound as it fell into a shallow pool below.²¹

One author describes caves in her novels:

A dazzling glare, token of the passing of the storm's fireworks, outlined an irregular opening in the wall before them, revealing at the same time a large room beyond the wall. . .Presently another blaze lit up the night outside, showing a cavern-like space thirty feet in dimensions, with a rock roof above their heads, and a low doorway through which the light from the outside had come in.²²

The Hermit's Cave was merely a deep recess under the over-hanging shelf. It penetrated far enough to offer a retreat from the weather.²³

The way narrowed. Then it slipped into a crack in the wall side of the ravine. Blacker and rougher and downward now. Wet, slippery, cold and downward still. . .The air was heavy and damp. The stones were cold and wet, but not slimy, . . . he was in a cavern of rock, walls, roof, and sides, a tiny chamber tucked snugly under the creek bed with the water trickling along overhead.²⁴

19. Tawny, pp. 24-25.

20. Ibid., p. 42.

21. Black Storm, p. 91.

22. McCarter, A Master's Degree, p. 88.

23. McCarter, The Price of the Prairie, p. 128.

24. McCarter, A Wall of Men, pp. 355-356.

Pawnee Rock is described with considerable vigor and clarity in the Kansas novel:

At dawn we had sighted a peak against the western horizon. We were approaching it now---a single low butte, its front a sheer stone bluff facing southward. Toward the river, it lifted its head high above the silent plains; and to the north it stretched in a long gentle slope back to a lateral rim along the landscape.²⁵

The camp-fires that night burned at the base of a huge rock cliff whose perpendicular face stood out boldly above the river that wound around the edges. On the opposite side it sloped steeply down into the plain. A strange stone outcrop it was in this open prairie, destined to stand out through many coming years as a landmark and point of historic fame. Christened later from the fierce fight of the wild Penis, it gained the name it was destined to keep for all future time, the well-known name of Pawnee Rock.²⁶

Behind it looming up from the floor of the prairies was Pawnee Rock, a great stone outcrop for whose abrupt upheaval some old volcano must have stoked its fires in the forgotten aeons of time. Sloping gently on one side from a faint swell, dim outline of a prehistoric river bank, it breaks on the other in a sheer stone cliff, isolated and majestic. Like the sphinx of the desert it sits, looking out across the level plains.²⁷

Pawnee Rock lay there before us. . .The big rock was not perpendicular, even in the steepest places. There were crannies for footholds, and knobby projections to hold by, so if one kept a steady head it was possible to climb almost to the very top of the cliff.²⁸

. . .the memorable pile of stones where in all the plains surrounding it a child could ^{scarcely} find a pebble to put in his sling.²⁹

. . .that grand old monument of rock, which, as a sentinel, guarded the vast plains where the Indian had maneuvered to hold the whites at bay.³⁰

25. McCarter, Vanguards of the Plains, pp. 70-71.

26. McCarter, In Old Quivera, p. 79.

27. McCarter, The Corner Stone, p. 9.

28. Aplington, Pilgrims of the Plains, pp. 224-225.

29. Vale, Between Two Fires, p. 33.

30. Ibid., p. 49.

Sand and sand dunes are described by several Kansas authors:

There was nothing but a hot yellow plain, wrinkled here and there in great barren folds, with wave and crest and follow of wind-sifted sand crawling endlessly back and forth along the face of the landscape.³¹

. . .the sand-hills, a distance of almost a hundred miles to the north. These remarkable mounds of sand, in width from five to fifteen miles, border the Arkansas River on its south bank. They separate the river from the table-lands lying farther to the south.³²

The level land about Fort Dodge showed vividly green against the yellow sand-hills across the river.³³

. . . and farther off the brown indefinite shadowings of half-tamed sand dunes.³⁴

In those days, north of the Republican River, there were numerous low sand dunes stretching across the wide valley.³⁵

One thinks of canyons and sand dunes in connection with rivers. A few references at this point will give the reader an idea of the manner in which the Kansas novelists describe rivers and smaller streams of the state.

The Arkansas River is perhaps more frequently mentioned than any other river. The following excerpts will show the writers' descriptions of this stream:

The great Arkansas River is in sight. It is a wide, wide stream, with little islands covered with a young growth of cottonwood trees dotting its surface. Across the river are hills of yellow sand, rolling back like waves of gold. On this side of the river the banks are low and marshy. Shallow pools and lakelets gleam blue between the tall rushes.³⁶

31. McCarter, The Reclaimers, pp. 73-74.

32. Emerson, Buell Hampton, p. 310.

33. McCarter, Vanguards of the Plains, pp. 358-359.

34. McCarter, Winning the Wilderness, Foreword, no page number given.

35. Hinkle, Tawny, p. 73.

36. Aplington, Pilgrims of the Plains, pp. 218-219.

The Arkansas runs bottomsides up across the Plains. Its waters are mainly under its bed, and it seems to wander aimlessly among the flat, lonely sand-bars, trying helplessly to get right again.³⁷

At last we came to the Arkansas River---flat-banked, sand-bottomed, wide, wandering impossible thing---whose shallow waters followed aimlessly the line of least resistance back and forth across its bed. Rivers had meant something to me... But here was a river which could neither fetch nor carry. Nobody lived near it, and it had no deep waters. . . I felt exposed on its blank, treeless borders.³⁸

They pitched suddenly over the brow of a long swell, beginning a quick descent into what appeared to be a broad valley. A river serpented through it, the course marked. . . by the dark border of trees at its brink. The Arkansas, Dunham knew it to be, river of erratic flood-waters and engulfing sands.³⁹

Here the Arkansas River came down from its mountain beginnings as clear in the summer days as the sunlight that struck through it, revealing the ripples of its shallow bars. Flat upon the landscape it seemed to lie, as it seems yet to lie, as it will appear to the stranger who sees it for the first time as long as the snows supply its fountains and the willows bend beside it where old trails of forgotten buffalo trace the sag gray slopes.⁴⁰

. . .the sprawling Arkansas River. . . at a point where the Santa Fe trail of earlier days crossed that stream of deceptive shallows and wide-spreading bars of silt-white sand.⁴¹

River.⁴² . . .the freakish, and at times, treacherous Arkansas

Mrs. McCarter often describes the Neosho River, as

illustrated at this point:

The Neosho became bank-full; then it spread out over the bottom lands, flooding the wooded valley, creeping up and

37. McCarter, The Price of the Prairie, pp. 358-359.

38. McCarter, Vanguards of the Plains, pp. 69-70.

39. Ogden, Short Grass, p. 80.

40. Ogden, West of Dodge, pp. 1-2.

41. Ogden, The Cow Jerry, p. 1.

42. Vale, Between Two Fires, p. 15.

up towards the bluffs. It raced in a torrent now, and the song of its rippling over stony ways was changed to the roar of many waters, rushing headlong down the valley. . . Every draw was brimming over, and the smaller streams became rivers. All these streams found their way to the Neosho and gave it impetus to destroy---which it did, tearing out great oaks and sending them swirling and plunging in its swiftest currents. It found the soft, uncertain places underneath its burden of waters and with its millions of unseen hands it dugged and scooped and shaped the thing anew. When at last the waters were all gone down toward the sea and our own beautiful river was itself again, singing its happy song on sunny sands and in purple shadows, the valley contour was much changed.⁴³

The Neosho is a picture here with still expanses that mirror the trees along its banks, and stony shallows where the water, even in midsummer, prattles merrily in the sunshine, as it hurries toward the deep stillnesses.⁴⁴

Other rivers as the Smoky Hill, the Kaw, and the Solomon are sometimes mentioned as illustrated in the passages given below:

. . . the floods of the Smoky Hill, unchecked through the aid of vegetation and cultivation, raged in springtime.⁴⁵

. . . the open plain by the lazy, slow-crawling Smoky Hill River.⁴⁶

The waters of the Smoky Hill flowed yellow, flecked with foam, beside our camp.⁴⁷

At last they came out on a hilltop where a great fall of land led down to a valley---to two meeting valleys. One was wide and smooth, and the stream to which it belonged was far away hidden in a curving band of trees. The other was narrower, with steeper sides, and in it a broad stream, almost a river, showed a warm surface between the trees. At the edge of it, where the great hill dropped down to the meeting of the valleys, lay the town. (Lawrence).⁴⁸

43. The Price of the Prairie, pp. 77-78.

44. Ibid., p. 161.

45. Cooper, The Last Frontier, p. 29.

46. McCarter, The Price of the Prairie, p. 25.

47. McCarter, Vanguards of the Plains, p. 350.

48. Lynn, The Land of Promise, p. 75.

A very vivid description of the Kaw River during a flood season is given by Dr. Hinkle, in his book, Black Storm:

Then in the distance came another sound from the north. A sound heard by every man, one that cast a strange feeling of apprehension over them---the ever-increasing, ever-threatening roar of the river at the flood. It came now as a dull, steady, booming sound, incessant, with now and then a louder roar as the flood waters battled with themselves. . . the Kaw River, now bank full, sweeping all to destruction before it.⁴⁹

The roar of the river now a mile wide, sounded sullen and sinister in the night. The dark river was sweeping by, roaring and tossing giant, up-rooted cottonwood trees on the face of the water. Great areas of driftwood rode down to be swiftly pushed asunder by the waters boiling up beneath. . . .Another sound farther down. . . a great splash followed by a roar as the waters cut in under a high bank, hurling tons of earth and gravel into the seething flood.⁵⁰

Smaller streams, such as the Wakarusa, the Cimarron, and the Arickaree are mentioned in several passages:

. . .the banks of the half-dry Arickaree, where, across the trickling concourse of the stream, a small island reared itself, with its shelter of cottonwoods and osiers.⁵¹

This gathering place. . .was at a certain crossing of the Cimarron River, which flowed toward the east for a matter of fifty miles so nearly on the line that Texas cattlemen used it as a marker to know when they were out of the Indian country.⁵²

Hughes said the Cimarron was treacherous, like all those Western Kansas rivers, full of quicksands in which cattle would mire down, causing endless trouble and delay to pull them out.⁵³

The trail here led us up the Arickaree fork, a shallow stream at this season of the year full of sand-bars and gravelly shoals. Here the waters lost themselves for many feet in the underflow so common in this land of aimless, uncertain waterways.

49. Pp. 46-47.

50. Pp. 49-50.

51. Cooper, The Last Frontier, p. 246.

52. Ogden, Short Grass, p. 130.

53. Ibid., p. 170.

54. McCarter, The Price of the Prairie, p. 257.

Other streams, some unnamed, some called by fictitious names, are described in the Kansas novels. A few quotations will serve to give an idea of these descriptions, which, even though they do not deal with any real river, yet give the reader an idea of the behavior of the Kansas river in general:

. . .the Manaroya, a beautiful stream that had its rise in Horton's Grove. The cool refreshing waters of this rapid, pebble-bottomed brook, were, indeed, a welcome sight. . .the restless, rippling waters in their flight from the gushing springs in the lichened woods above, on and on, even to the boundless ocean.⁵⁵

Goose Creek at this point was a narrow stream, but deep and swift with its ever muddy and turbulent waters.⁵⁶

Below them a little creek wound through a shelving outcrop of shale, bordered by soft steep, earth banks wherever the shale disappeared. This Kingussie Creek was sometimes a swift, dangerous stream, but oftener it was a mere runlet with deep water-holes carved here and there in the yielding shale. Just now at the approach of July heat, there was only a tiny thread of water trickling clear over yellow rock, or deep pools lying in muddy thickness in the stagnant places.⁵⁷

It was an ugly little stream, with much mire and some quicksand to be avoided; with deep earth canyons and sliding avalanches of dirt on steep slopes, and now and then a stone outcrop jagged and difficult. . .It was called Little Wolf because it was narrower than the willow-fringed stream into which it emptied. But Big Wolf Creek could rarely boast of half the volume of water that the sluggish little tributary held. Big Wolf was shallow, with more shale and sand along its bed. Little Wolf was narrow and deceptively deep in places.⁵⁸

. . .and then at last he saw not far beyond a wide, shallow stream with a small fringe of willows along its margins

55. Emerson, Bussell Hampton, pp. 72-73.

56. Hinkle, Black Storm, pp. 100-101.

57. McCarter, The Reclaimers, pp. 207-208.

58. McCarter, Winning the Wilderness, pp. 176-177.

and with many deep-cut cattle trails leading down its high sandy bank to the shining water. . .the sandy margin of the clear, shallow river. . .Many long sand bars stretched out in the water, far up and down the river, and here and there, . . .he came to swift little shallows.⁵⁹

The strangest natural phenomen in Kansas is the pool in the central part of the state called Wacoonda. Mrs. McCarter, in her book, The Peace of the Solomon Valley, describes this freak of nature at some length:

What we went out for to see was a wonderful welling up of salt water just like the clear green waves off Long Island. A huge mound of earth thirty feet high and a hundred across forms the cup which the water fills to the brim. The depth of this pool is only guessed at. So here it lies, by long secret underground ways reaching out to the sea or some salt spot a thousand miles away. Aeons and aeons ago the sea waves swept over Kansas. . .And then came its upheavals and down-settlings. . .Anyhow this precious, clear, green pool of salty water was forgotten; and year on year, century on century, rising and falling like the tides of the ocean, it dimpled under the summer winds and smiled back at the skies above it. Like the pioneers of this Solomon Valley it defied the drouth to burn it out, or the winter blizzards to lock it up with ice. And the Indians came and called it Wacoonda---Spirit Water---and worshipped ever what they could not understand.⁶⁰

. . .that this bit of the sea left here for so many centuries had so loved this place, so rested in the peace and beauty of the valley, sunkissed, and mist-swathed, with the tenderness of the springtime, the glory of midsummer, the splendor of autumn, that it chose to stay here. . . The clear green water dimpled in silver sparkles under the glorious moon.⁶¹

A few authors write of springs, as the following passages will illustrate:

59. Hinkle, Black Storm, pp. 131-132.

60. Pp. 39-40.

61. P. 91.

It was mud; and they followed it back up the draw until they came to water, lying in little seepy places. . . "Another spring," announced Mr. Gard.⁶²

. . . the little spring shelved in by shale at the lower edge of the shale.⁶³

In the center was a small basin of water, clear as crystal, fed by a little spring that gushed out of a mound to trickle down over a gravelly bed, until it reached the small pool.⁶⁴

. . . a bog made by seeping springs in the hillside.⁶⁵

Minerals such as coal, oil, gas, lead, and zinc, are mentioned once or twice. A few illustrations will serve here:

He had a vague vision that he was discovering coal for the common good. So when Daniel Sands put his mind to bear upon the worm of coal that came wriggling up from the drilled hole on Janey's lot, the worm crawled away from Jamey.⁶⁵

In another passage in the same novel, the author describes the interior of a coal mine and a fire which occurred there.⁶⁶

Haldeman-Julius also writes of a coal mine:

She understood the general routine of mining, and had been daily picturing him going down in the cage to the bottom, travelling through a long entry until he was under his home farm and located in one of the low, three-foot rooms where a Kansas miner must stoop all day.⁶⁷

William Allen White mentions minerals in several other places in his novel:

in the early adolescence of the town came coal and gas and oil.⁶⁸

62. Lynn, The Land of Promise, pp. 53-54.

63. McCarter, Vanguards of the Plains, pp. 296-297.

64. Hinkle, Tawny, pp. 94-95.

65. White, In the Heart of a Fool, p. 47.

66. Ibid., pp. 164-165.

67. Dust, p. 196.

68. P. 63.

New wells in new districts had come gushing gas and oil into Harvey in great geysers.⁶⁹

. . . coal and oil and gas and lead and zinc.⁷⁰

Mrs. McCarter also mentions minerals:

. . . the dust of the mines, the black oil derricks and the huge reservoirs of natural gas.⁷¹

. . . there's oil, millions of oil, down those old coal-shafts.⁷²

Various kind of rocks and rock products are mentioned in the Kansas novel:

...he gathered together a store of pink boulders about a block of limestone that lay on the highest point. Slowly and patiently he built upon this base a rude stone cross, its yellow-gray form contrasting in color with the heaps of round pink stones piled about it.⁷³

Lumber was hard to obtain but a neighboring hillside had furnished stone, and Ellen had been surprised to find walls of the soft, brownish-yellow of the native stone.⁶⁴

. . . one of the huge granite mounds.⁷⁵

Two decades in Kansas saw hundreds of such cabins on the plains. The walls of this one were nearly two feet thick and smoothly plastered inside with a gypsum product, giving an ivory-yello finish, smooth and hard as bone.⁷⁶

One could continue for a long space quoting passages about the landscape and formations of Kansas. But since it is the aim of this thesis, not to discuss points dealt with only trivally by the Kansas writers, but simply to give an idea of the most important points described and discussed, the chapter will end here.

69. P. 155.

70. P. 69.

71. The Price of the Prairie, p. 487.

72. The Cottonwood's Story, p. 94.

73. McCarter, In Old Quivera, pp. 113-114.

74. Lynn, Free Soil, p. 43.

75. Cretcher, The Kansan, p. 200.

76. McCarter, Winning the Wilderness, p. 25.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

From the discussion found in the preceding chapters, it should be clear that the Kansas novelist has, on the whole, made considerable use of nature as seen in the state. He has pointed out with delight the animals commonly found in the state. He has dwelt upon the beauties of the sunflower, the goldenrod, and all the various kinds of trees, shrubs, flowers, and plants. He has shown the terror of the tornado, as well as the beauties of the Kansas sunset. He has pointed out how spring is especially a season of hope in an agricultural state such as this one is; how the Kansas summer is a season of tormenting heat, but also one of pleasurable dawns and evenings; how the fall is a time of pure enjoyment, and the winter one of either cold and wretchedness, or beauty. And finally, he has made clear how because Kansas is a rural state, with people more directly in contact with nature than those in urban communities, they are better able to appreciate its beauties.

One other fact about the place of nature in the life of the state emerges in the pages of the novelist; namely, that the characters of the people are directly affected by the natural forces about them. Nature is seen as a live force; and in the Kansas novel, as in the Wessex novels of Hardy, nature may be said at times to be "one of the characters". Such a state of affairs is hinted at in

the following passage from Margaret Hill McCarter, which may be used fittingly to bring this study to a close:

But the wilderness has a siren's power over the Anglo-Saxon always. The strange savage land was splendid even in its silent level sweep of distance. . . Here were miles on miles of landscape opening wide to more stretches of leagues and leagues of far boundless plains, and all of it was weird, unconquerable, and very beautiful. The earth was spread with a carpet of gold splashed with bronze and scarlet and purple, with here and there a shimmer of green showing through the yellow, or streaking the shallow waterways. Far and wide there was not a tree to give the eye a point of attachment; neither orchard nor forest nor lonely sentinel to show that Nature had ever cherished the land for the white man's home and joy. The buffalo had paid little heed to our brave company marching out. . . The gray wolf skulked along in the shadows of the draws behind us and at night the coyotes barked harshly at the invading band. But there was no mark of civilized habitation, no friendly hint that aught but the unknown and unconquerable lay before us.¹

1. McCarter, The Price of the Prairie, pp. 254-255.

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