

X

THE BLUEGRASS

GOD'S Country!

No humor in that phrase to the Bluegrass Kentuckian! There never was—there is none now. To him, the land seems in all the New World, to have been the pet shrine of the Great Mother herself. She fashioned it with loving hands. She shut it in with a mighty barrier of mighty mountains to keep the mob out. She gave it the loving clasp of a mighty river, and spread broad, level prairies beyond that the mob might glide by, or be tempted to the other side, where the earth was level and there was no need to climb: that she might send priests from her shrine to reclaim Western wastes or let the weak or the unloving—if such could be—have easy access to another land.

In the beginning, such was her clear purpose to the Kentuckian's eye, she filled it with flowers and grass and trees, and fish and bird and wild beast, just as she made Eden for Adam and Eve. The red men fought for the Paradise—fought till it was drenched with blood, but no tribe, without a

THE BLUEGRASS

mortal challenge from another straightway, could ever call a rood its own. Boone loved the land from the moment the eagle eye in his head swept its shaking wilderness from a mountain-top, and every man who followed him loved the land no less. And when the chosen came, they found the earth ready to receive them—lifted above the baneful breath of river-bottom and marshland, drained by rivers full of fish, filled with woods full of game, and underlaid—all—with thick, blue, limestone strata that, like some divine agent working in the dark, kept crumbling—ever crumbling—to enrich the soil and give bone-building virtue to every drop of water and every blade of grass. For those chosen people—such, too, seemed her purpose—the Mother went to the race upon whom she has smiled a benediction for a thousand years—the race that obstacle but strengthens, that thrives best under an alien effort to kill, that has ever conquered its conquerors, and that seems bent on the task of carrying the best ideals any age has ever known back to the Old World from which it sprang. The Great Mother knows! Knows that her children must suffer, if they stray too far from her great teeming breasts. And how she has followed close when this Saxon race—her youngest born—seemed likely to stray too far—gathering its sons to her arms in virgin lands that they might suckle again and keep the old blood fresh and strong.

THE LITTLE SHEPHERD OF KINGDOM COME

Who could know what danger threatened it when she sent her blue-eyed men and women to people the wilderness of the New World? To climb the Alleghanies, spread through the wastes beyond, and plant their kind across a continent from sea to sea. Who knows what dangers threaten now, when, this task done, she seems to be opening the eastern gates of the earth with a gesture that seems to say—"Enter, reclaim, and dwell therein!"

One little race of that race in the New World, and one only, has she kept flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone—to that race only did she give no outside aid. She shut it in with gray hill and shining river. She shut it off from the mother state and the mother nation and left it to fight its own fight with savage nature, savage beast, and savage man. And thus she gave the little race strength of heart and body and brain, and taught it to stand together as she taught each man of the race to stand alone, protect his women, mind his own business, and meddle not at all; to think his own thoughts and die for them if need be, though he divided his own house against itself; taught the man to cleave to one woman, with the penalty of death if he strayed elsewhere; to keep her—and even himself—in dark ignorance of the sins against Herself for which she has slain other nations, and in that happy ignorance keeps them to-day, even while she is slaying elsewhere still.

THE BLUE GRASS

And Nature holds the Kentuckians close even to-day—suckling at her breasts and living after her simple laws. What further use she may have for them is hid by the darkness of to-morrow, but before the Great War came she could look upon her work and say with a smile that it was good. The land was a great series of wooded parks such as one might have found in Merry England, except that worm fence and stone wall took the place of hedge along the highways. It was a land of peace and of a plenty that was close to easy luxury—for all. Poor whites were few, the beggar was unknown, and throughout the region there was no man, woman, or child, perhaps, who did not have enough to eat and to wear and a roof to cover his head, whether it was his own roof or not. If slavery had to be—then the fetters were forged light and hung loosely. And, broadcast, through the people, was the upright sturdiness of the Scotch-Irishman, without his narrowness and bigotry; the grace and chivalry of the Cavalier without his Quixotic sentiment and his weakness; the jovial good-nature of the English squire and the leavening spirit of a simple yeomanry that bore itself with unconscious tenacity to traditions that seeped from the very earth. And the wings of the eagle hovered over all.

For that land it was the flowering time of the age and the people; and the bud that was about

THE LITTLE SHEPHERD OF KINGDOM COME

to open into the perfect flower had its living symbol in the little creature racing over the bluegrass fields on a black pony, with a black velvet cap and a white nodding plume above her shaking curls, just as the little stranger who had floated down into those Elysian fields—with better blood in his veins than he knew—was a reincarnation perhaps of the spirit of the old race that had lain dormant in the hills. The long way from log-cabin to Greek portico had marked the progress of the generations before her; and, on this same way, the boy had set his sturdy feet.

XI

A TOURNAMENT

ON Sunday, the Major and Miss Lucy took Chad to church—a country church built of red brick and overgrown with ivy—and the sermon was very short, Chad thought, for, down in the mountains, the circuit-rider would preach for hours—and the deacons passed around velvet pouches for the people to drop money in, and they passed around bread, of which nearly everybody took a pinch, and a silver goblet with wine, from which the same people took a sip—all of which Chad did not understand. Usually the Deans went to Lexington to church, for they were Episcopalians, but they were all at the country church that day, and with them was Richard Hunt, who smiled at Chad and waved his riding-whip. After church Dan came to him and shook hands. Harry nodded to him gravely, the mother smiled kindly, and the General put his hand on the boy's head. Margaret looked at him furtively, but passed him by. Perhaps she was still "mad" at him, Chad thought, and he was much worried. Margaret was not shy like Melissa, but her face was kind. The General asked them all