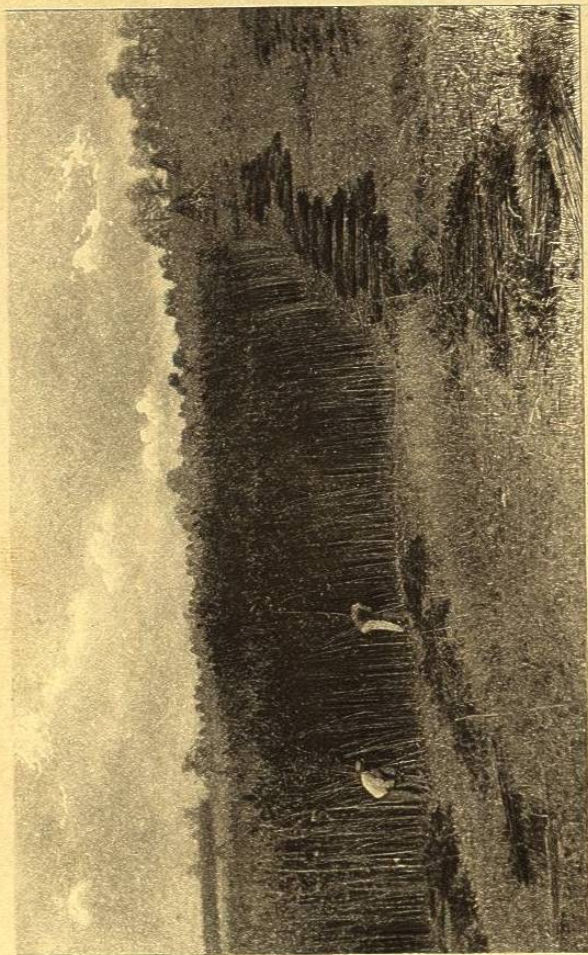


loved by the iris-eyed, burnish-breasted, murmuring doves, already beginning to gather in the deadened tree-tops with crops eager for the seed. Well remembered also by the long-flight passenger pigeon, coming into the land for the mast. Best of all wild things whose safety lies not in the wing but in the foot, it is loved by the hare for its young, for refuge. Those lithe, velvety, summer-thin bodies! Observe carefully the tops of the still hemp: are they slightly shaken? Among the bases of those stalks a cotton-tail is threading its way inward beyond reach of its pursuer. Are they shaken violently, parted clean and wide to right and left? It is the path of the dog following the hot scent — ever baffled.

A hundred days to lift out of those tiny seed these powerful stalks, hollow, hairy, covered with their tough fibre, — that strength of cables when the big ships are tugged at by the joined fury of wind and ocean. And now some morning at the corner of the field stand the black





LET THESE MEN BE THE STRONGEST

men with hooks and whetstones. The hook, a keen, straight blade, bent at right angles to the handle two feet from the hand. Let these men be the strongest; no weakling can handle the hemp from seed to seed again. A heart, the doors and walls of which are in perfect order, through which flows freely the full stream of a healthy man's red blood; lungs deep, clear, easily filled, easily emptied; a body that can bend and twist and be straightened again in ceaseless rhythmical movement; limbs tireless; the very spirit of primeval man conquering primeval nature—all these go into the cutting of the hemp. The leader strides to the edge, and throwing forward his left arm, along which the muscles play, he grasps as much as it will embrace, bends the stalks over, and with his right hand draws the blade through them an inch or more from the ground. When he has gathered his armful, he turns and flings it down behind him, so that it lies spread out, covering when fallen the same space it filled while standing. And



so he crosses the broad acres, and so each of the big black followers, stepping one by one to a place behind him, until the long, wavering, whitish green swaths of the prostrate hemp lie shimmering across the fields. Strongest now is the smell of it, impregnating the clothing of the men, spreading far throughout the air.

So it lies a week or more drying, dying, till the sap is out of the stalks, till leaves and blossoms and earliest ripened or unripened fruits wither and drop off, giving back to the soil the nourishment they have drawn from it; the whole top being thus otherwise wasted — that part of the hemp which every year the dreamy millions of the Orient still consume in quantities beyond human computation, and for the love of which the very history of this plant is lost in the antiquity of India and Persia, its home — land of narcotics and desires and dreams.

Then the rakers with enormous wooden rakes; they draw the stalks into bundles, tying each with the hemp itself. Following

the binders, move the wagon-beds or slides, gathering the bundles and carrying them to where, huge, flat, and round, the stacks begin to rise. At last these are well built; the gates of the field are closed or the bars put up; wagons and laborers are gone; the brown fields stand deserted.

One day something is gone from earth and sky: Autumn has come, season of scales and balances, when the Earth, brought to judgment for its fruits, says, "I have done what I could — now let me rest!"

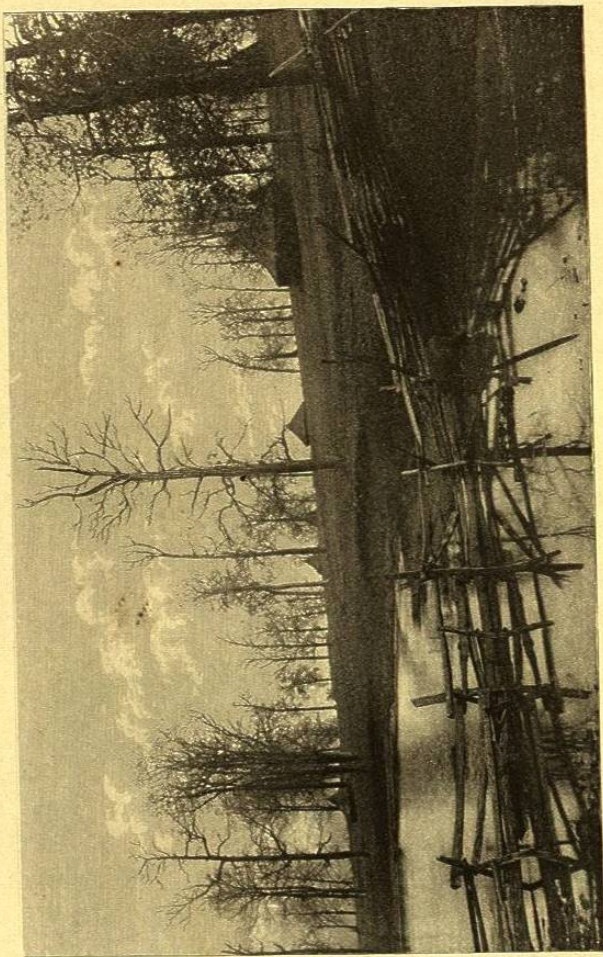
Fall! — and everywhere the sights and sounds of falling. In the woods, through the cool silvery air, the leaves, so indispensable once, so useless now. Bright day after bright day, dripping night after dripping night, the never-ending filtering or gusty fall of leaves. The fall of walnuts, dropping from bare boughs with muffled boom into the deep grass. The fall of the hickory-nut, rattling noisily down through the scaly limbs and scattering its hulls among the stones of the brook below.



The fall of buckeyes, rolling like balls of mahogany into the little dust paths made by sheep in the hot months when they had sought those roofs of leaves. The fall of acorns, leaping out of their matted green cups as they strike the rooty earth. The fall of red haw, persimmon, and pawpaw, and the odorous wild plum in its valley thickets. The fall of all seeds whatsoever of the forest, now made ripe in their high places and sent back to the ground, there to be folded in against the time when they shall arise again as the living generations; the homing, downward flight of the seeds in the many-colored woods all over the quiet land.

In the fields, too, the sights and sounds of falling, the fall of the standing fatness. The silent fall of the tobacco, to be hung head downward in fragrant sheds and barns. The felling whack of the corn-knife and the rustling of the blades, as the workman gathers within his arm the topheavy stalks and presses them into the bulging shock. The fall of pumpkins into





WHERE THE STately STACKS RISE AMID THE DEADENED TREES

the slow-drawn wagons, the shaded side of them still white with the morning rime. In the orchards, the fall of apples shaken thunderously down, and the piling of these in sprawling heaps near the cider mills. In the vineyards the fall of sugaring grapes into the baskets and the bearing of them to the winepress in the cool sunshine, where there is the late droning of bees about the sweet pomace.

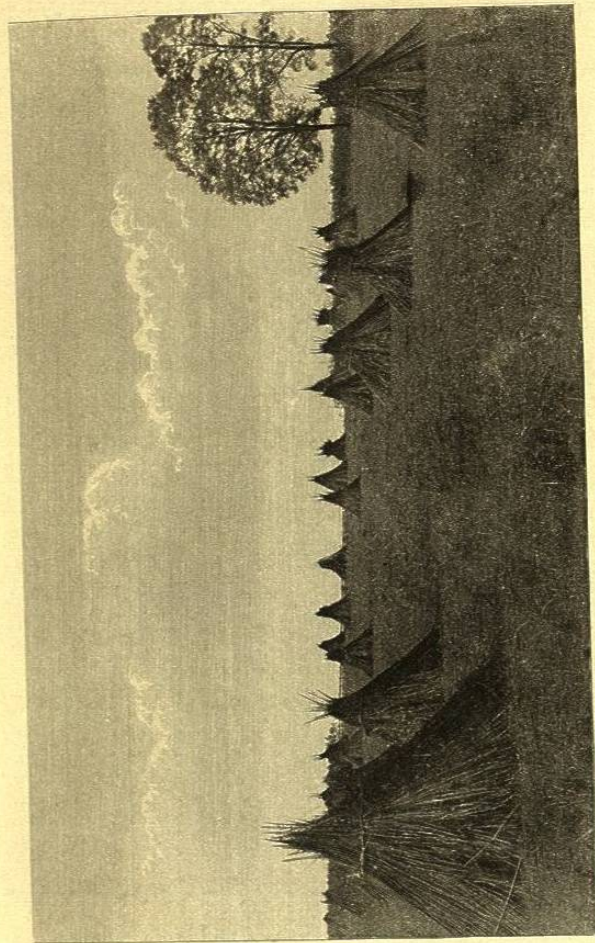
But of all that the earth has yielded with or without the farmer's help, of all that he can call his own within the limits of his land, nothing pleases him better than those still, brown fields where the shapely stacks stand amid the deadened trees. Two months have passed, the workmen are at it again. The stacks are torn down, the bundles scattered, the hemp spread out as once before. There to lie till it shall be dew-retted or rotted; there to suffer freeze and thaw, chill rains, locking frosts and loosening snows—all the action of the elements—until the gums holding together the filaments of the fibre



rot out and dissolve, until the bast be separated from the woody portion of the stalk, and the stalk itself be decayed and easily broken.

Some day you walk across the spread hemp, your foot goes through at each step, you stoop and taking several stalks, snap them readily in your fingers. The ends stick out clean apart; and lo! hanging between them, there it is at last—a festoon of wet, coarse, dark gray riband, wealth of the hemp, sail of the wild Scythian centuries before Horace ever sang of him, sail of the Roman, dress of the Saxon and Celt, dress of the Kentucky pioneer.

The rakers reappear at intervals of dry weather, and draw the hemp into armfuls and set it up in shocks of convenient size, wide flared at the bottom, well pressed in and bound at the top, so that the slanting sides may catch the drying sun and the sturdy base resist the strong winds. And now the fields are as the dark brown camps of armies—each shock a soldier's tent. Yet not dark always; at times snow-



THEN THE FIELDS ARE AS THE CAMP OF AN ARMY.



covered; and then the white tents gleam for miles in the winter sunshine — the snow-white tents of the camping hemp.

Throughout the winter and on into early spring, as days may be warm or the hemp dry, the breaking continues. At each nightfall, cleaned and baled, it is hauled on wagon-beds or slides to the barns or the hemphouses, where it is weighed for the work and wages of the day.

Last of all, the brakes having been taken from the field, some night — dear sport for the lads! — takes place the burning of the “hempherds,” thus returning their elements to the soil. To kindle a handful of tow and fling it as a firebrand into one of those masses of tinder; to see the flames spread and the sparks rush like swarms of red bees skyward through the smoke into the awful abysses of the night; to run from gray heap to gray heap, igniting the long line of signal fires, until the whole earth seems a conflagration and the heavens are as rosy as at morn; to look far away and descry on the horizon an



array of answering lights; not in one direction only, but leagues away, to see the fainter ever fainter glow of burning hempherds—this, too, is one of the experiences, one of the memories.

And now along the turnpikes the great loaded creaking wagons pass slowly to the towns, bearing the hemp to the factories, thence to be scattered over land and sea. Some day, when the winds of March are dying down, the sower enters the field and begins where he began twelve months before.

A round year of the earth's changes enters into the creation of the hemp. The planet has described its vast orbit ere it be grown and finished. All seasons are its servitors; all contradictions and extremes of nature meet in its making. The vernal patience of the warming soil; the long, fierce arrows of the summer heat, the long, silvery arrows of the summer rain; autumn's dead skies and sobbing winds; winter's sternest, all-tightening frosts. Of none but strong virtues is it the sum. Sickness



WINTER'S ALL-TIGHTENING FROSTS



or infirmity it knows not. It will have a mother young and vigorous, or none; an old or weak or exhausted soil cannot produce it. It will endure no roof of shade, basking only in the eye of the fatherly sun, and demanding the whole sky for the walls of its nursery.

Ah! type, too, of our life, which also is earth-sown, earth-rooted; which must struggle upward, be cut down, rotted and broken, ere the separation take place between our dross and our worth—poor perishable shard and immortal fibre. Oh, the mystery, the mystery of that growth from the casting of the soul as a seed into the dark earth, until the time when, led through all natural changes and cleansed of weakness, it is borne from the fields of its nativity for the long service.