

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## PRAIRIES AND THEIR TREELESSNESS.

THE prairies of the Mississippi Valley, especially those lying within the limits of the great State of Illinois, constitute one of the most remarkable features of North American topography. Hundreds of thousands of acres, stretching through all the central and western portions of the state, present a scene of almost unbroken level and treelessness. The great prairies are neither a perfect plain, nor in all cases completely undiversified with arboreal vegetation. The surface is generally undulating; and here and there rise gravelly knolls and ridges on which the timber has obtained a foothold. But these wooded spots are often many miles apart, and scarcely serve to rest the eye, wearied with the monotony of an interminable clearing, fenceless meadows, and unsheltered farm-houses.

The traveler, leaving Chicago by one of the great southern routes—for instance, the Chicago, Alton, and St. Louis Railway—passes out through the muddy and straggling outskirts of the Western metropolis, and, ere he has thought of the great prairies through which he had expected to pass, he finds himself at sea. Looking from his car-window, the country landscape seems at first to be entirely wanting. One feels as if passing over a trellis-bridge three hundred feet above the surrounding region. The customary objects—forests, shade-trees, fences, houses, distant hills—which elsewhere lift themselves to the horizontal plane of the eye, are not here. The traveler must make the second effort, and look down upon the level of the country upon whose