

diminish materially the amount of soil upon an acre; and, with the benefits which they confer, it is doubtful whether they are not actually to be desired, especially in regions subject to drought. A field will produce no more grain with the stones picked out than with the stones left in.

From our earliest knowledge of the prairies, speculation has been rife as to their origin. The old and popular belief was that which attributed their treelessness to the annual burning of the grass by the Indians. But the prairies present other phenomena which the annual burning fails to explain. Besides, the treelessness remains in regions where the burnings have ceased. And, lastly, the treeless prairies were not the only regions burned by the Indians. And if they were, it seems more likely that the Indian burned the rank grasses because the region was treeless, than that the region became treeless from the burning of such vegetation as flourishes in the shade of a forest.

It has sometimes been suggested that the region was originally forest-covered, and that the southern cane flourished in such luxuriance amongst the trees as to rob them of their moisture and nourishment, and thus cause their extinction. The cane, having deprived itself of the protecting shade of the forest, was in turn scorched out by the rays of the summer sun. This theory is every way unsatisfactory.

With others, the absence of trees is to be attributed to the dryness of the atmosphere—and consequently of the soil—at certain seasons of the year. It can not be doubted that the treeless plains of the far West, and also other regions, have failed to produce arboreal growths through an insufficient supply of moisture. Still other treeless regions are such from an excess of saline constituents in the soil. But all such regions have nothing in common with the prairies of Illinois except their treelessness. The topog-