

niggers can be. One seldom realises what an extraordinary variety of tint there may be in a coloured population. Some of the excursionists were of the most perfect coal-black shade, from which every gradation could be noted till the crisp hair and characteristic features remained as almost the only traces of negro blood. Westward still, through endless monotonous miles of maize and yet unbroken land, the train moved wearily hour after hour, until on getting up in the morning we found ourselves unmistakably on the great prairie at last. Perhaps no type of scenery so closely fulfils a previous mental picture of it as the western prairie of North America. Seen after a hot summer, it spreads out as a vast, treeless, arid expanse, covered with a short and sparse grass, which, though green and flowery in spring, becomes parched by drought into a kind of hay, through which the baked soil everywhere peeps. For hundreds of miles together the undulations never rise into hills nor sink into valleys. A sluggish streamlet, depressed a few feet or yards beneath the general level, winds here and there in lazy curves till it joins some sluggish and muddy tributary of the Missouri, that creeps along a level plain bounded by low bluffs. But ere autumn comes many of these watercourses have been reduced to groups of stagnant pools.

At proper intervals stations have been built with means for supplying the engines with water and fuel. It was at one of these halting-places that we were able to set foot for the first time on the prairie. The brief halt enabled us to make some observations that served materially to beguile the tedium of this railway journey, and to invest the featureless prairie with a new interest. Every traveller across the continent has remarked the incredible number of ant-hills and burrows of the prairie dog and gopher by which the