

A TYPICAL KANSAS COMMUNITY.

FORTY years ago there were on the map of Kansas a few red spots indicating the location of forts, and here and there along the streams near the State's eastern border were little circles indicating towns. Many of the names upon that early map remain, and designate hopeless villages, the scenes of brave deeds and patriotic efforts; and a few of the towns of a generation ago survive, fulfilling in some small measure the bright dreams of their founders. But most of the old names, once familiar to the whole nation, are forgotten. Could some ghost of those stirring times come back to call the roll, how many such towns would fail to respond! Quidaro? Gone! Mariposa? Gone! Sumner? Gone! Tecumseh? Gone! Minneola? Gone!

From 1870, for several years eastern and central Kansas was a battle-ground between man and nature. In those years the desert was finally subdued. During the succeeding decade, men devoted themselves to the occupation of running up and down the newly made garden with surveyors' chains, making squares and parallelograms, and selling them to one another, or to such strangers as were drawn into the game by the enticement of speculation. Fictitious values prevailed. There was a very plague of financial delusions. Men from all parts of the world were victims of the disease, and came to Kansas to satisfy their longing to behave unwisely. Cities sprang up in a month. Men ceased to be business men, and became gamblers, with land as the stakes. Then, nine years ago, the crash came. Since that time, the face of the Kansas town, and the heart of it too, have changed. One might reasonably call the present an era of home-making. The gambler has gone. The speculator finds his market unrespon-

sive. Another generation is reaching maturity. This generation, which is not native to the State, is trying to make home more attractive; indeed, the word "home" has been generally applied to Kansas for the first time during the last five years. The present residents of the State mean to remain. They are no longer in camp. No one now talks of going "back home" when his fortune is made. To mention this condition as remarkable may amuse the outside world, but the experience is a new and delightful one for Kansas.

Chiefly by reason of its newness and of a certain cosmopolitan aspect, the Kansas town differs from villages elsewhere in the United States, and presents a few interesting variations from the common type. The largest town in the commonwealth has hardly forty thousand inhabitants. Most of the county-seats in the eastern half of the State, where the rainfall is copious and where crops are bountiful and regular, contain about three thousand persons each. The county-seat is in the strictest sense a country town. The people live almost entirely upon the tributary country. There are no factories. The money that the farmers of the county spend for food, clothing, fuel, and the comforts of the farm home is the cash capital upon which the town does its business. This capital is passed from the grocers to the clothing merchants, to the druggists, to the furniture dealers, to the hardware sellers, and to professional men. In the older communities of the Eastern and Middle States necessity has developed factories, which convert raw material into finished products, and money from the outside world comes in. But Kansas is yet hardly a generation old, and it has not entered the manufacturing era of industry.

In Kansas towns the streets run at

right angles. The highways are as straight as the surveyor's chain could make them. Set back at regular distances from the sidewalks are the more pretentious residences, built in the obtrusive architectural style of the "boom" days, complacent in their sham magnificence. The paint has been washed from many of them, and their faded appearance is almost tragic. The story of these unpainted houses is written upon the town, and in the leafless season it depresses the stranger; but in early spring, when the grass comes, nature covers up the barren aspect. The smaller houses of the village are less depressing. Perhaps they do not cover such bitter disappointment. They are like modest cottages the world over.

There is in these towns an intense social democracy, such as does not exist in older American States. Class lines are but indistinctly drawn. The term "family," as used to distinguish the old rich from the new rich, is meaningless. There are of course gradations, lines of difference, and distinction between cliques and coteries, in the polite society of any town. There are indeed the upper and the lower crusts in the social formation. But there is no "dead-line." In every Kansas community, society is graded something after this fashion: the "old whist crowd," the "young whist crowd," the "literary crowd," the "young dancing crowd," the "church social crowd" or "lodge crowd," and the "surprise party crowd." It often happens, in a family containing several grown-up children, that one daughter attends lodge socials, where there are spelling-matches, and where she may enjoy what the reporter for the country paper calls "a literary and musical programme." Perhaps the eldest daughter attends the meeting of the Browning Circle, where she is bored for an hour or two; she probably comes home with a married couple who live on her street. The son of the family goes across the rail-

road track, and dances a noisy quadrille on a bare kitchen floor, to the music of a cabinet organ and a fiddle. It is possible that the parents may be present at the weekly meeting of the Bon Ton Whist Club, where the festivities begin with an elaborate seven o'clock supper. At these stately functions, the awarding of the gilt-edged copy of Ben-Hur and the hand-painted smoking-set to the best players forms an important part of the evening's enjoyment.

This fictitious but typical instance should not be taken too literally, though it is true enough to indicate the utter absence in Kansas society of what in older communities are called class lines. One may almost choose his own companions. Wealth plays a minor part in the appraisal of people. Indeed, the commercial rating of the "lodge crowd" is probably higher than that of the "old whist crowd," although the "lodge crowd" does reverence to the "old whist crowd" by referring to it sneeringly as "society." Since there are no old social standards, and since no one knows anybody's grandfather's previous condition, young people find their own places. The assorting occurs in the high school. An ambitious mother, living on the wrong side of the railroad, is glad to find that her daughter has passed above the "surprise party crowd," has gone around the "church socials," and at the end of her schooldays has planted herself firmly among the "entre-nous" girls. There the young lawyer's wife and the old cattleman's daughter meet. A young woman in this group finds an opportunity to marry into the "young whist crowd." After the children are in school she may be graduated easily into the Bon Ton Whist Club. But if she does not improve the opportunities offered at the "entre-nous" gatherings, in a few years she will begin to cultivate her mind, and will drift naturally into the Browning Circle. Then she will appear occasionally at the quarterly town

dances, when the most exclusive women of the village wear their second-best gowns as a rebuke to the men for inviting such a mixed company.

Generally the church members do not view these semi-public dances with alarm. The Methodists are the strictest of the popular sects in nearly every Kansas community. When the State was safely Republican by enthusiastic majorities, it used to be said that the Methodist church was the Republican church. In the old days of the boom, the Baptist church was often called the Democratic church. Even now the Baptists find their congregations somewhat smaller than those of the Presbyterians. In nearly every town there is a struggling Episcopal church, and in its folds gather the society leaders, and the wives of the traveling men who make their homes there. On the outskirts of every important village are to be found the humble meeting-houses of worshipers after the old fashion, — the Friends, the Free Methodists, the United Brethren, and the Dunkards. These churches gather their congregations from the one-story houses of the town and from the farms near by. Frequently waves of intense religious feeling sweep over these flocks. In winter they hold "protracted meetings," and glow with a fervor all unknown to the dwellers in the upper streets. In summer these simple worshipers hold camp-meetings in the groves along the creeks, and members of the more fashionable churches drive from town in the cool of the evening, and from their buggies watch them with patronizing interest.

It is the occupants of the buggies who give the town whatever intellectual reputation it may have in the State. They are the buyers and the readers of books. Nothing else indicates the exact grade of a town's intelligence so clearly as the books which the people read. The town in which I write is a fair example of Kansas communities; and here all the most interesting new books in popular

literature and the best periodicals have a good market. Yet our kinspeople in the Eastern States carefully save their year-old magazines and books to send to us. In every Kansas town there is a group of men and women who read the best books, and who go regularly to Chicago or to St. Louis every year to hear the best music.

During the days of the boom innumerable "real estate" colleges sprang up. They indicated the presence of men and women whose ideals were high, and who, when money was abundant, immediately began to surround themselves with those influences that would soften the hard environments of the Western life, and make "reason and the will of God" prevail. Their zeal led these promoters beyond the limits of sound judgment, but it is to their credit that their intentions were good. The colleges survive, and they are the best things that have outlived the boom. Only here and there has one been abandoned; on the other hand, in many a Kansas town, the little, debt-ridden college that has survived, after a struggle against great odds, is the nucleus around which gathers whatever light the community may have. The children of the adjacent country are sent to these schools; for though they are not the best possible, they are the best now obtainable. One finds, for instance, their instructors on the school boards and in the city councils. They appear as delegates to the state political conventions, indicating by their presence that the voters in the towns bear no grudge against a man for being careful of his "seens" and "saws," whatever men in the country may think of such refinements of speech.

The best manifestation of the influence of the college is found in the security and growth of the town public library. It is worth a ward politician's political life to talk about cutting down library expenses. Generally a public library contains from one thousand to

four thousand books. The schoolchildren, black and white, spend their odd moments in the reading-room. Women from every social circle use the books. E. P. Roe is still the favorite author, as he is the favorite author of the frequenters of libraries in some of the Eastern States. On the other hand, in one public library in Kansas the copy of Emerson's First Series of Essays has been rebound four times. In this village no bookseller finds it profitable to keep the old-fashioned dime novels, so popular among boys ten years ago.

When Kansas goes to the theatre, however, it drops back into the dark ages. Doubtless there are worse theatrical companies than those that visit Kansas, but no one has ever described them. The best people leave the theatre to those who like to hear the galleries echo with merriment when the supernumeraries walk before the curtain to light the gas foot-lights. The opera-house is not a town gathering-place, except when the graduating exercises of the high school are held there, and when the townspeople come together to hear the terrible annual concert of the silver cornet band. On these occasions one observes the absence of the chaperon, and here, as elsewhere in the town, young men and women meet upon terms of equality.

There are three out-of-doors town gatherings, — football games, baseball games, and political meetings, — whereat men play a more important part than they play in the opera-house, for they are not manacled by decorum. At the political meetings the men predominate; but at the town games it is the women — the younger women — who give the scene the appearance which may have made ancient tournaments so glorious. Here there is a homely familiarity. When one pounds whoever sits beside him on the bench, at the climax of the game, it is with the assurance that one is pounding an old friend. The men take off their coats, but the crowd is decorous. There is no

drinking. A drunken boy at a Kansas game would cause nearly as much comment as a drunken girl. The girls join in the college yells, talk across the ropes to the players in the field, surge up and down the line with the boys, and no one sneers.

There are no rich men in these Kansas towns. The men who own a million dollars' worth of property number less than half a score in the whole State. Those who control half a million dollars' worth of property might ride together in a sleeping-car, with an upper berth or two to spare. Every town has its rich man, measured by a local standard, who is frequently a retired farmer turned banker; not one in five of these is rated at \$100,000, but each is the autocrat of his county, if he cares to be. The mainspring that moves the town's daily machinery may be found in the back room of the bank. There it is decided whether or not the bonds shall be voted. There it is often determined whether there shall be eight or nine months of school. There the village chronicles are spread upon the great ledgers every day. The town banker supplies the money for every contest. If he is wise, he watches his little corner of the world as a spider watches from its web. The great trust which he keeps requires a knowledge of the details of the game that men are playing around him. Yet with all his power this town banker would be counted a poor man in the city. Seldom is his annual income as much as \$10,000. But he lives in the best house in the town. The butcher saves his best cuts for him, the grocer puts aside his best vegetables, and the whole town waits to do his bidding.

Next to the banker in economic importance is the best lawyer. If the town is a thriving one, the lawyer makes perhaps \$4000 a year. But he does not receive all his income in cash. Some of it he takes in trade: from the farmer butter and eggs, from the storekeeper

his wares, from the editor printing. There are from three to five lawyers, in each good county town in Kansas, who earn more than \$1500 a year. When a lawyer gets in debt to a respectable minority of the influential people, he may be elected county attorney, and during his term of office he is expected to pay his debts. If he fulfills the public expectation, he has another season of waiting, and at the end of it he is made district judge, when the balance-sheet with the town is supposed again to be made up. A district judge, upon retirement, can generally make a living. The town doctor knows so many things about so many people, and so many people owe him money, that he too is always considered a safe man to put on a local county ticket. Be it said to his credit he makes an efficient officer; there is no man in better standing than he.

In a community where there is no large source of outside revenue, where no factory pours its wages into the local commerce, much of the business is done on credit. The storekeepers do so much bartering that they have established a system of currency of their own. A merchant will issue sets of coupons, in one dollar and five dollar books. The coupons are of various decimal denominations, and they read, "This coupon is good for cents in trade at Wither-
spoon's grocery." When the cash in the drawer is low, and when the creditor will accept them, these coupons pass over the counter for cash. They pass from one hand to another, and are usually accepted at face value. The merchant invests his earnings in local bank-stock, farms, or farm mortgages, and after a while he may retire from business to lend his money: then he is on the way to the presidency of the bank. The real estate agent and insurance broker who lends money in a small way is also in the line of promotion to the banker's desk. But before he reaches the goal he lives many a shabby day, which he

hopes the grocer and the coal dealer have forgotten.

The real estate agent's money comes in lumps, and he lacks the peace of mind which the storekeeper's clerk enjoys, whose wages may be \$20 or \$40 or even \$80 a month; for his wages come regularly, and there is always the reasonable hope that some day he may be a partner in the business or have a store of his own. In addition to this hope, the clerk's social position may be as good as anybody's. His wife and daughter may find friends among the most desirable people in the community. If the clerk and his son do not meet their employer at the whist club, it may be only because it is their night "off" and his night "on" at the store. Prices of real estate are so low that many a man earning \$50 a month builds a cottage by the aid of the Home Building and Loan Company which flourishes in every town. Instead of paying rent, he pays interest and a few dollars of the principal every month. On his own lot he may grow flowers for the annual sweet-pea contest, and fortune may send him such a bounty of bloom as will give him the right to assume a tolerant air when discussing floriculture with the man who holds his note.

The tenement-house and the flat are unknown in Kansas. Wages are not high, but opportunities for saving are many. The man who, rated by his wages, in another State would be called a poor man, in Kansas is fairly well-to-do. A printer's wages, for instance, are rarely more than eight dollars a week, yet many a printer has made a start in life, and has even bought the paper which employed him. There is a tradition that the Kansas country editor is poor. The truth is, he earns from \$1200 to \$3000 a year. He lives well; and being a politician, he frequently shares the party loaves and fishes. He is respected and his credit is good at the bank, where he is able, and generally willing, to give the one good turn which deserves another.

It may be said in the editor's favor that he is the only regular employer of skilled labor in the community. The mason and the carpenter work at odd times. The village cobbler does repairing only. There are no great factories that employ hundreds of laborers. Here and there is a town favored with a railroad-shop, where a few score men find irregular work repairing damaged cars. But the dinner-pail is hardly seen in Kansas.

A well-known writer of Western stories, half a decade ago, drew a picture of the hopeless faces of the women who rode in a parade of the Kansas Farmers' Alliance. The type in the story was interesting, but the real Kansas women who rode in the Alliance parade saved it from being a clumsy and stupid affair. By their very presence they made it a cheering, good-natured, color-flecked pageant. They rode on hay-racks covered with patriotic bunting, and they were dressed in white and in yellow at the ratio of sixteen to one, to symbolize their financial creed. In all the parades of any political party the women are an important feature. But their participation in politics practically ends with the parades. They vote only in municipal and school elections. Now and then, at a municipal election in a very small town, it happens that, half in a jocose spirit, the men elect a woman's ticket, when there is absolutely nothing for the woman elected to do. The incident is a neighborhood joke, at which the women laugh; and the thrifty correspondents of Eastern journals sell to their papers "stories" about the "great fight between the men and the women of Kansas, which ended in the overthrow of the men." Women are often elected to clerical positions in the county and in the city. A woman was once successful as assistant attorney-general of the State. When the Kansas woman becomes a bread-winner, her social position is not affected. There is no social circle that the working woman finds it impossible to enter. The steno-

grapher, with her \$50 a month, may snub the banker's daughter. The school-teacher finds no door closed to her social advancement.

Yet it is said that Kansas is governed by petticoats. If by this it be meant that women shape the public sentiment of the Kansas town, the saying is true. In most towns in other States, the corners of the principal streets are occupied by dram-shops. In the town where this paper is written, the influence of women has been exerted so forcibly that three of the four corners where the two main streets cross are occupied by banks. Instead of Hogan's Retreat on the fourth corner stands a bookstore. There the boys and the young men of the town find a meeting-place. There they make their appointments. There they browse through the weekly illustrated papers and the magazines, and look through new books. In this bookstore the football games are bulletined, the baseball games are talked over, and politics finds its forum. Among all the men and boys who frequent this resort there is no habitual drinker; there is not one whose name has been stained with scandal. These young fellows are business men, clerks, professional men, real estate brokers, and college students. They are clean, shrewd, active young men, who have been brought up in a town where the women make public sentiment,—in a town of petticoat government, wherein a woman has never held an administrative municipal office. It is a town of eight thousand inhabitants, without a saloon, without a strange woman, without a town drunkard.

Sloping down from a gentle hill toward a creek, the Kansas town shows at a distance its pointed steeples, its great iron water-tower, and its massive school-house, which stands above the elms and cottonwoods and maples. No smoke-stack pours its blackening flood over the natural beauty of the grass and trees. At night, the farmer across the valley

sees the town as a garden of lights. At such a time, one does not recall the geometrically exact angles of the streets and the gray dust upon the unpainted

houses; the night softens the garish remnants of the boom. Then the sun-burned Kansas town has a touch of romance.

William Allen White.

A MASSACHUSETTS SHOE TOWN.

BROMPTON was one of the earlier New England settlements. Its cemeteries contain numerous stones dating back almost to the middle of the seventeenth century, and the town celebrated its bicentennial years ago. Its first meeting-house was burned by Indians. In the Revolutionary era its citizens hurried away to the earliest engagements around Boston; and of that period it preserves many memorials, notably two fine old taverns, in which some of the most famous of the Continental officers are known to have lodged. But we are not now concerned with its history, and I come directly to the time, a decade or so before the civil war, when the town, after having been for more than a century and a half a small farming community, for which all necessary boot and shoe making and repairing were easily done by a few cobblers, was beginning to make shoes on a larger scale, for export.

Brompton has neither water - power nor any of the other natural advantages which would have made it possible to predict a manufacturing community. Indeed, most shoe towns lack natural advantages. The Providence which determined the establishment of the first shoe-shop in a new locality was inscrutable. The first person to make shoes in Brompton for sale elsewhere was a native of the town, who had returned thither with a competence, after several years of experience in the shoe trade in a neighboring town. A very old man, now a hermit on a farm in Maine, who worked in this Brompton shop during

his early manhood, recently said to me: "They 're always a-tellin' they 's a powerful lot o' wonderful new machines been invented sence I worked in the shop, nigh fifty year agone, an' I 'm willin' to believe 'em; but I 'll bet anything they 's one thing they can't never make, with all their inventin', an' that 's a machine to peg shoes with." This, from a shoemaker, nearly a generation after the pegging-machine had come into general use, serves better than any detailed statement to illustrate the simplicity of the shoemaking methods of the early time. The shop did not employ more than a dozen men, all acquaintances of the manufacturer. The sons of the resident farmers were quick to take to the new occupation, and several other shops were started before the outbreak of the civil war. A number of them, remodeled into cottages, barns, store - houses, even hen-houses, still stand, reminders of the meagre beginnings of a great industry.

The immigrants to Massachusetts from the northern New England States, — more especially from Maine, — who began to come about this time, found their way to Brompton, as soon as the supply of workmen from the neighborhood became inadequate. The newcomers were for the most part enterprising, unattached young men, of good habits and antecedents. They were cordially received. Although the transformation from a farming town to a manufacturing town was fast taking place, the community was yet essentially homogeneous in race, customs, and religion.