

LETTER III.—*Continuance of the Flood — Change in the Soil — Buffalo Grass dying out — Wild Plums and other Fruits.*

SALINA, KANSAS, June 12.

THE river continues to rise, and is beginning to overflow the flats. It is impossible, while this state of things continues, to run trains through. I am consequently detained longer than I expected. But I need not be idle, for I have already seen enough to occupy me for some days in writing out my impressions of this most beautiful of all the regions I have ever seen.

About the meridian of this place the character of Kansas changes—not so much in conformation and general appearance as in geology and the composition of the soil. East of this, that is below this, the only stone is a magnesian limestone. Of this, and of its excellence as a building stone, I shall speak more fully hereafter. Here the sandstone region commences—of the varieties of which I have already spoken. Below this the soil is almost black, and extremely fertile. Here, on this extensive river flat, it is quite dark-colored; but as we mount upon the higher grounds to the west, it is a rich dark brown—in some few places rather thin, but generally several feet in thickness. It is evidently strongly impregnated with iron, and to the eye is better than any upland soil I ever saw in Pennsylvania. In our State it would be first-rate wheat land; but whether wheat can ever be successfully grown on the plains west of this is a question I cannot answer. Colonel Fisher, who lives more than thirty miles west of this, in a place where the brown stone, of which I have before spoken, abounds, told me that it produced root crops admirably, especially sweet potatoes. The land of which he spoke is far from the river and fairly within the buffalo grass region.

Here, near Salina, the buffalo grass begins; but it is evidently yielding to the coarser and stronger grasses of the prairie. Up about Fort Harker it predominates. The idea, that as the buffaloes are driven back the buffalo grass ceases, is one that everywhere prevails in this country. I think it is well founded. My own opinion is, that this is the only grass that can bear the heavy trampling of those vast herds. Hence, small as it is, it keeps possession as long as the buffaloes remain; but when they are driven off, the larger and coarser grasses come in and smother it. We talk in the East of prairie grass as if it were a distinct variety; but there are several varieties. In no place did I see so many and so beautiful flowers as in the neighborhood of Fort Harker. I saw two varieties of cactus—one the common thick-lobed cactus which we often see in gardens in our State; the other is very