

HOW THE GRASSHOPPERS CAME.

BY A NEBRASKA WOMAN.

I WISH to tell the readers of ST. NICHOLAS a story about the Great American Desert, where the grasshoppers made such a fearful raid last Summer.

When you see the little creatures hopping harmlessly about in the grass, you can think of what a power for evil they possess when they gather together in such armies as those which overran our part of the country last year.

The weather was intensely warm here all last season, and for thirty days within the space of six weeks the thermometer ranged from 100° to 116°.

It was during this heat in the latter part of July that our Swede girl, Selma, said she must go home to care for her aged mother. Pete and Polly, our two mules, were harnessed to the express wagon in the early morning, and a pleasant little company of us started out to take Selma home.

Our road lay up the banks of a clear winding stream, on each side of which our industrious Swede neighbors have settled, and turned over the virgin soil of this "Garden of the Desert," upon which appeared fields of waving grain.

We had not ridden far before Pete and Polly, who had been whisking their long ears very contentedly, began to lay them back and toss their heads into the air. As they tossed them higher and higher, we noticed that a grasshopper came at intervals with a bounce into our laps or hit our hands and faces, and the farther we went north the more frequently their whizz and click assailed our ears, or their sharp wings struck our noses, till we sympathized with our restless mules. Soon we noticed the little brown bodies and gray wings lying in piles along the shady side of our track, and that the green leaves of the corn hung like slit ribbons swaying in the breeze; and farther on there was here and there a field that had been planted on the sod where nothing but the stalk was left, and we said, "See what the grasshoppers have been doing."

We set Selma down at her door, and turned toward home, wondering if the grasshoppers were going to do much harm.

The season had been unusually dry, as well as warm, and for that reason the small grain, though very light, was ready for the reaper, or already cut.

Soon after the harvesters had repaired to the field that afternoon, the cry was heard, "The grasshoppers have fallen upon the corn-fields." Then we knew we had met the scouting party in

the morning, and that, by some wonderful insect power, they had telegraphed to the main body the news of our rich fields.

We had a corn-field of twenty acres, that was the pride of our foreman, and pronounced the most luxuriant of any for miles up and down the valley. The destroyers were at work upon it, but the men, hoping to save a part, left their harvest and built fires all along the rows. They whipped and switched and smoked, running from one part of the field to the other in the heat, but it was all of no avail. The little invaders ate on, and at night nothing was left of our boasted corn-field but the tall bare stalks, looking like bean-poles.

The Indian women had corn and bean patches near us, and when they came and saw their work all destroyed they wept and moaned, and said, "God is not pleased, or He would not send the grasshoppers to eat what we need."

The next day the raiders came to our gardens, and though we covered the plants with barrels and boxes and sheets, though we smoked and whipped and brushed, hoping to save some vegetables, they seemed to laugh at our dismay, and kept steadily at work, even eating our onions and red pepper-stalks down to the ground.

They stripped young fruit-trees of their leaves and gnawed our shrubbery and flowers till there was no green thing left to cover the brown earth, and then they mounted our shade trees, and the ground was soon covered with falling leaves.

The heat was intensified by the presence of such a mass of animal matter, and our nights, usually so cool, were hot and uncomfortable. The unwonted sound of the rustling of millions of wings caused the dogs to howl dolefully, and a vague terror began to steal over our hearts.

Near nightfall of the third day of the presence of the foe, a brisk breeze blew from the north. Our neighbor Keturah came to our door, and said, "Do you see how the smoke is rising on every side of us?"

We could see from ten to twenty miles in any direction, and all about us were pyramidal columns of smoke, as we thought, rising toward the heavens. "How is it," we asked, "that these great masses of smoke appear simultaneously at every point?" And as we gazed and saw them slowly grow blacker and rise higher, an indefinable dread of some fearful coming took possession of us.

Two of our number were out taking a gallop on their ponies. On their return they said, "Did you see the grasshoppers rise? We heard a sound like a rushing wind, and thought we were riding into the edge of a whirlwind" (such as are often seen here, carrying pyramids of dust and sand many feet from the earth), "but, looking a moment, saw the grasshoppers going up in cloud-like masses, and they passed off south."

"Ah! that was the grasshoppers, and we thought it smoke!" we exclaimed; and immediately the weight was lifted from our hearts. Some grasshoppers were left near our buildings, but they were merely going to rest for the night, and by noon next day very few were to be seen. In just one week from the day of their first arrival, a great shower of grasshoppers fell again, and began to devour what the others had left. One corn-field which the others had left in part, and which still promised a small harvest, was attacked by these later marauders, and our last hope for corn that season soon vanished.

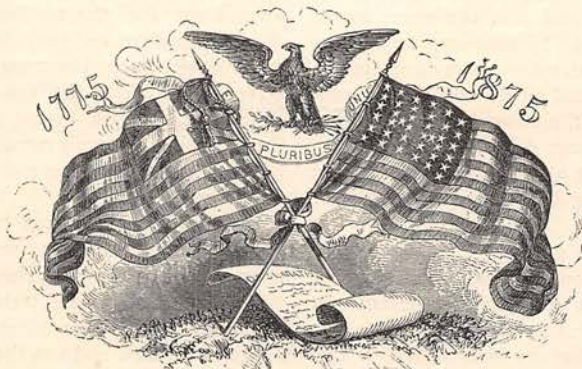
Our shade-trees were entirely stripped of their leaves, the netting screens in our doors and windows hung in tatters, and the greedy millions made their way into our houses to devour plants which we thought hidden from their insatiate little jaws. They ate holes in clothing, in curtains, and in pin-cushions, and I heard of one woman who found the draught of her stove clogged with grasshoppers, they having fallen down the pipe in such numbers as to fill it.

The houses and fences soon were black with the

millions of these insects. We could not even see the bark on the trees because of the myriads of wings, and we beheld the result of the labor of many hands a blank before us. We sat in awed silence, feeling we were in the presence of that Power which can bar the raging waves of the sea with little grains of sand and send an army of little insects to bring to naught the boasted work of man.

The third day after their arrival, clouds fitted across the sun at intervals, screening us from its intense heat, and toward night a company of us, daughters of these prairies, dragged our really exhausted selves to the river, hoping to find a little refreshment by a bath. We were scarcely in the water before we were startled by a crash, a peal, and then a rushing wind. Peering over the high northern bank, we saw a black cloud driven furiously up toward the zenith, and at the same time the sun burst from under a dark veil in the west, revealing to our eyes a scene of wonder. Myriads upon myriads of little wings were flashing like specks of silver in the sunlight, not only as far as the eye could reach, east, west, and south, but as far as we could see into the air above us, and we knew the grasshoppers were driven again before the north wind.

When our bath was finished, very few of them were left to annoy us as we returned home, and great was our relief and joy to have them gone. But we did not look forward to the want which has oppressed so many hearts, and to the relief of which so many of the readers of ST. NICHOLAS have, no doubt, contributed.



OUR FLAG IN 1775 AND IN 1875.