

SOREN O. KOLSTOE (1888-1978)
in N DAKOTA The Northern Prairie State
Bernt L. Wills (1963)

THE PRAIRIE

Intro

The majestic sweep of the prairie;
The endlessly rolling prairie;
It billows along
Like a lilt in a song,
As far as vision can carry.

The winds that sweep o'er the prairie;
That skitter and play on the prairie
Are refreshing and free
As a breeze from the sea
And seldom seem sodden and dreary.

Grain now grows on the prairie
Where grasses once covered the prairie;
But loving the land
Keeps erosion in hand
And safeguards the strength of the prairie.

More precious than ought on the prairie;
Are the people who live on the prairie.
Big hearted and kind
As any you'll find
And they cherish their homes on the prairie.

The magnificent sweep of the prairie;
The wide-spreading, home-dotted prairie.
God prosper each farm
Each ranch and each town
On the length and the breadth of the prairie.
S. O. Kolstoe

A SLOUGH

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It's just a slough, a common cat-tail slough;
Its stagnant smells lie heavy on the air.
It's fringed with sedge, a cottonwood or two,
With clumps of bullrush growing here and there.

A Mallard duck convoys her downy brood,
With scarce a ripple in her silent wake.
She circles, stops, and dips in search of food;
Her young ones crowd around to share the take.

But 'neath the placid surface life is grim--
A bitter feud, a never-ending strife,
Where all the myriad things that crawl or swim,
Contest each other's right to food and life.

Now months have passed, the reeds no longer
green,
Stand stiffly silent in the early dawn.
The autumn air is crystal clear and keen;
The heavy breath of summer nights is gone.

A mallard's quack rasps the startled air;
An answering murmur breaks the silent dawn;
A whirl of wings crescendos to a roar;
They're in the air--; the morning flight is on!

A hunter crouching tensely in his blind,
Sees hurtling forms against the morning skies,
The slough resplendent in the glowing dawn,
Becomes a scene of glory in his eyes.
S. O. Kolstoe

THE RED RIVER VALLEY

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Flat, fair and fertile,
It stretches ever onward lush and green.
Fields, flocks and farmsteads
Enhance the bounteous richness of the scene.

Grain, groves and cornfields;
A mammoth garden spot is here unfurled.
God's gift to mankind;
A horn of plenty for a hungry world.
S. O. Kolstoe

The Badlands:

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THE BADLANDS

A mighty chasm rends the solid plain.
The Prairie seems to teeter on its brink.
A vast expanse of tower-pierced terrain,
Where scoria-sided canyons interlink.

A battle ground where nature's forces met
And gouged the earth in wild and frenzied fight--,
A fairy land with beauty unsurpassed,
Where form and color vie to charm the sight.

And there it lies; a work of strange design--,
Where nature's wonted features seem reversed;
Where fire and water dropped their ancient feud,
And etched a mountain range down in the earth.
S. O. Kolstoe

This landscape smiles, a mild and placid smile.
 Her wooded hills roll onward mile on mile.
 The lakes and pools that nestle in her vales,
 Provide a subtle deepness to her smile.

But eons past the scene was grim and bleak;
 A glacial ice sheet gouged the frozen earth,
 Bore its mammoth burden toward the south
 And dumped its ugly load of rocks and dirt.

Erosion's force with firm artistic touch
 Set its hand to smooth the ugly piles.
 God planted trees and grass and flowering shrubs,
 And fashioned for our eyes a land that smiles.

And now at last a wearied Prince of Peace
 When saddened by a world of strife and guile,
 May look this way, and here at last may find
 A garden spot of peace on which to smile.
 S. O. Kolstoe

THE BUTTES

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They stand in mystic silence on the plain
 Wrapped in dreams of eons long since past;
 The scattered remnants of an ancient plain
 That braved erosions forces to the last.

The awesome story of creation's work
 Is plain to read as writ in shale and stone;
 Of ocean depth, of mighty upward thrust
 That raised the ocean floor into the sun.

And here I stand, a speck of living dust
 To view with awe-struck eyes this wonderous land
 A vast domain of buttes and sweeping vales;
 A masterpiece from God's creative hand!
 S. O. Kolstoe

In the eerie hours of the morning
 When the darkness begins to fade,
 When the inky blue of the eastern skies
 Takes on a roseate shade;

From out of the shadowy half-light
 There comes a mysterious sound;
 The prairie chickens are back again
 On their ancient dancing ground.

They boom, they hoot, and they cackle,
 They drum-roll the ground with their feet,
 They leap in the air in ecstasy
 And dance to their own drum-beat.

With yellow air-sacks distended
 And wing-feathers stiffly spread,
 They circle and prance, they dart and they dance,
 And joust with lowering heads.

Then suddenly all go silent;
 And quietly fly away;
 The frenzied spell of the early dawn
 Is lost with the coming of day.

I sit for a moment in silence
 And gaze at the empty space,
 Where moments before was enacted a rite
 As ancient as the race.

And a prayer is born in my bosom,
 That as ages shall come and have gone
 This hallowed ground may forever resound
 To the serenade of the dawn.
 S. O. Kolstoe

Ducks, ducks--hundreds of ducks,
The wetlands are vibrant with life.
The drakes are competing in courtship displays
And often in hot-blooded strife.

They zoom thru the air in their nuptial dance;
A swift and dizzy routine;
The air and the earth seem charged with life
In this spirited springtime scene.

The glistening green of the mallard drakes
Gives a dominant note to the scene.
While the chocolate and white of the pintail male
Gives a contrast, sharp and clean.

The jaunty tilt of the ruddy's tail
Gives expression to vigor and zest;
And even the spoonbill, ignoring his face,
Is trying to look his best.

The somber gadwall modestly tries
To enter the color display
And the baldpate with his creamy slick
Is beautiful too in his way.

The spritely teal in his powdery blue
And the half-moon on his face,
Bearing action and life wherever he goes,
Seems scattered all over the place.

The cans and redheads sedately aloof
Are adding a dignified tone.
They're riding the waves with consummate skill
And a grace which is theirs alone.

Slate-colored coats, sporting ivory bills,
Add to the holiday mood;
And shorebirds ranging along the beach
Are searching the mud for food;

And over the rushes the marsh hawks soar
In their sweeping, quartering way,
Looking for sick or unwary birds
On which they commonly prey.

And so we gaze in wonderment
On this marvelous living display;
Lifted in spirit; impressed anew
With nature's wondrous way.

S. O. Kolstoe

I believe, this wondrous out-of doors
Was meant for us to cherish and enjoy;
And game was meant as part of nature's gift,
For us to use but never to destroy.

I believe, wherever I may hunt
I'm but a guest within the hunting site;
Permission giv'n or merely so implied
Is mine by courtesy, and not a right.

I believe, that when my luck is good,
I should not boast, but take it well in stride;
And when it's bad, I should not fret too much,
And grousing, try to save my sagging pride.

I believe, that none should use a gun
Who doesn't know how deadly it can be;
Who with his reckless antics on the hunt
Exposes all to risk of tragedy.

I believe, that hunting is a game
Where I and every player must be fair;
Obey the rules designed to give to all
A chance to get his just and proper share.

I believe, to gain a sportman's rank,
The finest accolade I could receive;
And may I never waver or forget;
This is my hunting creed; this I believe.

S. O. Kolstoe

OUR LEGACY

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Nature wrought
Thru ages past
To build this wondrous land.
Our soil is deep
And richly stored
There's wealth on every hand.

Our flyways teem
With migrant birds
And scores remain to nest,
So all in all
Our bird count stands
Among the nation's best.

It's good for man
To make his home
Upon these fertile plains;
And wildlife too
Can flourish here
Where habitat remains.

This is our land
Our legacy
And guard it well we must;
A duty and
A privilege
A solemn, precious trust.

S. O. Kolstoe

North Dakota,
Our prairie home
We love you for the bounty of this place,
Your wide horizons,
Fertile soil,
Your gently rolling, ample living space.

We love you for
Your varied scenes;
Your valley flatness and your rolling plain,
Your sculptured badlands,
Flat-topped buttes
Your pasturelands, your rippling fields of grain.

We love you for
The mineral stores
That lie beneath the fertile surface soil,
Your seams of coal,
Ceramic clay
And deeper still, your precious pools of oil.

We love you for
The pioneers
Who boldly matched their brawn against your
strength;
Who broke your sod
And faced your storms
And proved themselves as worthy of your wealth.

We love you for
Your varied clime;
Your storms, your dazzling sun, your bracing air.
Winter blizzards
Rage at times
But nowhere else are heavens quite so fair.

We love you for
Your solid worth,
Your whimsies and your generosity;
Your gracious present,
Rugged past;
For what in future years you're yet to be.

S. O. Kolstoe