

National Gazette

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VOL. I.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 1791.

NUMB. 3.

FOR THE NATIONAL GAZETTE.

SOME PARTICULARS RELATIVE TO THE SOIL, SITUATION, PRODUCTIONS, &c. OF KENTUCKY;

Extracted from the Manuscript Journal of a Gentleman not long since returned from those parts.

THE river OHIO is, beyond all competition, the most beautiful in the Universe, whether we consider it for its meandering course, through an immense region of forests, for its clean and elegant banks, which afford innumerable delightful situations for cities, villages and improved farms, or for those many other advantages, which truly entitle it to the name originally given it by the French of *La Belle Riviere*. After passing a distance of five hundred miles upon those waters, I arrived at *Limestone*, which is the general landing place for people coming by water from the United States. The descriptions hitherto given of Kentucky have generally been thought extravagant; but as nobody has come forward in contradiction to the common reports, we naturally conclude a country must be very extraordinary, which every body unites in extolling.

Influenced by this idea, I approached this earthly Elysium, (as I supposed it) upon which Nature has been thought to bestow her most peculiar favors, and the seasons have been said to smile without interruption. The first appearance of *Limestone*, however, will be found dissatisfactory to every one that lands from up the River. A number of houses situated on a lofty and uneven bank, apparently at the foot of a very high hill, (which, on account of a bend in the river is not seen till you come within two miles of it) gives the stranger notice of his approach to *Limestone*. As you arrive you are mortified at finding the creek on which the town stands (so very conspicuous in the smallest maps) nothing better than a mere gut, which may nearly be leaped over. In this harbour are seen a few Kentucky boats, generally laying near the mouth, many of which have been broken up to form those straggling houses which are perceived on the bank. The people of this place never fail to inform you that this is the rag end of Kentucky, and as you are willing to consider it such with them, for want of comfortable accommodation, you are glad to get away from it as fast as possible.

However, as the quality of the land is the great object to emigrants, every one must be pleased with the soil, and was that the only thing requisite to make a country valuable or pleasing, Kentucky would be the most so in the world, as the land is no where excelled. After you are got fairly into Kentucky the soil assumes a black appearance, rich and light in substance, and should you visit the country in the spring, you will be surprized at finding no leaves under the trees. The reason is, the ground is so rich and damp, that they always rot and disappear with the winter, except where the soil is evidently poor, for that country. It then bears the appearance of the better sort of land in Pennsylvania and Jersey, tho' differing widely in substance, there being no land to be met with in the soil of Kentucky.

There is a species of flat, or split *Limestone* that pervades all the country, laying at unequal depths. In the rich and black-looking soil, it lays near the surface, and in general the nearer the stone lays to the surface the richer the land is found to be. At the same time the stone does not, as I expected, impede the growth of the trees, as they grow every where to an amazing height, except near the salt licks, where the influence of the

saline particles seems to check their growth.

Among the many accounts that have been given of Kentucky, none of them have done justice to the timber. Oak and locust on the flat lands are common at five feet diameter. Poplars growing on the beach lands are so common at five and six feet through, as hardly to be noticed. The beech grows to the thickness of four and five feet, and both of the last mentioned to the height of one hundred and twenty to one hundred and thirty feet. These, and the advantage of pasture in the woods, constitute the great excellence of Kentucky; the disadvantages will, I fear, nearly counterbalance the luxuriance of the soil.

The stories told of the abundance of grafs in the woods are in many instances true. You frequently find beds of clover to the horse's knees, sometimes a species of rush-grafs commonly called wild rye, from the similarity of its stalk to the rye so called among us; in other places we meet with large tracts of wild cane, very much esteemed by the wild and tame cattle, it continuing in verdure all the winter. There is also a species of vine called the pea vine, from its producing a small pod, resembling that of the garden pea, of which both horses and cattle are extremely fond. These are scattered generally through the country, according to the different soils, but are not to be met with universally. The woods, however, afford abundance of food for cattle, and in consequence of this abundance the people pay very little attention to making and improving pasture lands. The milk from this food is thin, and both that and the butter retain a strong taste of weeds. In hot weather their milk will turn sour in two or three hours after milking; but, as the custom of the country is to eat four milk, this disadvantage is not much regretted.

It is generally the practice with the Kentuckians to turn out their horses with the cattle, and a man is frequently two or three days hunting for a horse he wants only for half an hour. Their cattle have been, and are of necessity exposed during the winter to subsist in the woods, but the consequence is, that many of them die, and all suffer extremely; the common opinion being not well founded, that the climate is more favorable than in the middle States, which is sufficiently evident from the winters here frequently proving as cold as in Pennsylvania or Jersey: with this difference, that the changes are more sudden, and the effects more severely felt.

The houses in Kentucky, some few in the towns excepted, are scarcely deserving of the name: which we shall have the less room to admire at, when we recollect the short interval that has elapsed since the first settlement of the country.

A temporary hut is at first erected, at least as open as a New-England corn-crib; yet in those miserable habitations are seen Ladies neatly dressed, who are, as yet, obliged to reside therein for want of better houses. The Taverns are generally wretched, unless one or two in the Capital town, *Lexington*; and you are charged extravagantly for the worst fare; should a man go to Kentucky, who could eat neither milk nor bacon, his case would be pitiable; but I do not mean to reflect, on the contrary I am willing to allow that the buildings of every kind are improving as fast as the circumstances of the country will permit.

The convenience of a spring of water is the first and chief consideration in choosing a spot for a house; and as the roads in general are laid out upon the higher grounds, the country, to a traveller appears still to be uninhabited, an endless range of solitary woods preventing the agreeable view of farms and settlements. But upon a general muster-day, the scene is wholly changed. You

are then surprized at the number of inhabitants that emerge from the forests to practise in the art military.

The great boast of a Kentucky-man is the quantity of corn that the land will raise upon an acre; of which, one hundred and seven bushels is the greatest quantity that I could find ascertained to have been produced. This, in the fall, sells for six pence a bushel. The common produce of the soil is from fifty to eighty bushels an acre, in a favorable season. This upon an average, is about three times the quantity we can raise on an acre in the old states; grain of this kind must therefore always be low in Kentucky, probably lower than at present, when the country comes to be more opened.

Hitherto there has not been much more grain raised than has been consumed by the inhabitants; and the persons emigrating there, together with the trade down the river, may afford a fine prospect in theory, to individuals, but will never turn out of any solid advantage to the public of this settlement: The difficulty in returning up the river must render the voyage terrible. To make head against the stream must be done by dint of severe labor and main strength, and would require exertions which no man would ever wish to make a second time, who was not urged by the inducement of gaining a speedy fortune thereby.

In passing through the country during the summer season your attention is always drawn to the dryness of the creeks and runs. A little water is in some places, seen standing among the flat stones, but so warm with the sun that cattle will scarcely drink it. We feel hurt at the sight of a large and beautiful country, that will forever labour under the inconvenience of a want of springs and running water, at least, five months in the year. The lightness of the soil, in wet weather, soon makes the roads unpleasant for travelling, which are as soon dried again in fair weather. The rain sinks presently below the surface, the brooks which were just now flowing with water, are in a few hours dry, and seized as it were with a general thirst.

At present horse mills grind a great part of the corn and wheat of the country, altho' a comparatively small part of the latter is used by the inhabitants, who generally give the preference to Indian meal baked in a pot, or before the fire.

All strangers, upon their arrival here, undergo a purgation, which is thought to proceed from the limestone quality imparted to the water from the nature of the soil. Gnats and flies are very troublesome, particularly in the fall, at which season they become a perfect torment both to man and beast.

Log houses must be expected to be met with every where, boards being a very scarce article for want of saw mills; but the materials will in time afford beautiful habitations, walnut and wild cherry being common articles of building.

A Lawyer in travelling through Kentucky might well exclaim in the language of Virgil,

Quae regio in terris nostri non plena laboris—

For of law there is enough, claims for land interfering continually, and rights so laid one upon another, that scarcely any body knows who is safe. The emigration to this part of the continent has been amazing, and this is the best place in the world for people to remove to with large families, where they will find Providence sufficiently bountiful; or, if the view of the Emigrant should be to render himself and his posterity independent, here is the country that will suit his wishes—at the same time, let him understand that if he does not bring a fortune with him, he will find he must at first live low and work hard

It will require a long time to introduce luxuries into the region called Kentucky, in any great plenty. But if the Emigrant should be an enthusiast (as many are who come to settle here) and looks forward to the complete settlement of this territory, he will think it the land of promise, and point it out to his children to be the spot for the millenium of the world, where the farce of titular dignity and the parade of courts shall never be exhibited; where monarchy shall never intrude to trample upon the rights of man; but a pure and equal republican form of government shall gradually introduce the practice of those virtues, which are consonant to the true nature of our species.

The Buffaloes have entirely quitted the cultivated parts of Kentucky, and the Deer have become scarce; of wild turkeys however, there are an abundance nearly as tame as those bred in the yard. From their being extremely poor in the summer they remain unmolesed: in the winter they grow very fat, and are reckoned delicious food: of other birds there is no great variety.

No land appears better adapted to the culture of tobacco than that of Kentucky, and it is now become one of their staples. At present there are but few orchards, but as the country opens they will find it their interest to plant them.

The flour I have seen made here is generally black, and not so good as might be expected. Possibly it may be the fault of the mills, or it may proceed from the richness of the ground, tho' it must be confessed the grain itself looks well. As to money, it is scarcely a medium of commerce, except with shop and tavern keepers. Every thing has two prices, the *trade* and *cash* price. What cash there is, soon becomes collected in the shops, and returns for goods; imports selling from one to two hundred per cent more than the Philadelphia price; notwithstanding which, every one dresses gay, and except about the houses, you find the appearance of industry and cleanliness. The general mode of settling, with a new Emigrant, is to build a little log hut—he then sets about girdling, or killing the trees, and when that is done, puts in his corn without delay. Should he, after all this, not feel at home, nor relish his situation, or admire his prospects, his only consolation will be (if it can be called a consolation) that to the family of a poor man, women and children, it is a dreadful, I may say, almost an impossible thing to return.

Philadelphia Nov. 5, 1791.

Extract from the Proceedings of the General Assembly of St. Domingo, Sept. 28.

[Translated for the National Gazette.]

THE secretary of the committee of reports has reported the case of Mr. Bourne, and presented to the assembly the draft of a decree, which has been adopted, in the following terms:

“Mr. Silvanus Bourne, who has been appointed by the President of the United States of America consul for the said states at St. Domingo, having met with some difficulties from the Colonial tribunals in respect to his admission as consul; and being in consequence thereof upon the point of returning to his country—the provisionary administrative assembly for the northern department of this colony having notified their desire to the general assembly that Mr. Bourne should be invited to remain at the Cape and exercise the duties of his consularship, the general assembly has referred the further consideration of this matter to the committee of the constitution.

Sept. 29.

Decreed provisionally, That Mr. Silvanus Bourne be invited to remain in this colony; and in consequence of his compliance with this invitation, that the president of the assembly shall put his