

VOLUME I

AGRICULTURAL SOCIETIES

CHAPTER I

SOILS AND CLIMATE, MEN AND BREEDS

Soils, climate, the people and the stock they brought with them are the materials out of which Kentucky was created. Nature gave generously of soil and climate. These came into the possession, more than a century and a half ago, of a people with a strong agrarian tradition and a love of the domestic arts. What follows is the story of the use made by the people of Kentucky of the gifts nature entrusted to their keeping.

The soils of Kentucky vary in character from the highly productive lands of the Bluegrass, the Pennyryle, and the numerous valleys of the State to the sandy or weather-worn soils of the more rugged and otherwise less fortunate sections. The topography, in general, is that of a high-rolling plain, crossed again and again by river valleys, from which extend arms that give to the traveler the impression of traveling over a mountainous country. Actually, the only real mountains of the State are in the extreme southeastern section along the Virginia border.

Originally this rugged terrain, except for a region in the south-central part of the State known as "the Barrens," a region kept burned off by the Indians as pasture ground for buffalo and other game they protected, was heavily timbered. This timber was largely oak, beech, maple, sycamore, tulip, pine and many others less common. Native grasses and legumes filled in the space vacant of trees. The Bluegrass, a practically level and nearly circular area extending from Louisville in the west to Winchester in the east, was covered with canebrake, except spots where, like islands, rose clumps of giant oak and other trees. Survivors of this old forest may still be seen standing, beaten and scarred by storms, in the pastures throughout the region.

A deep and rich vegetable mold originally covered the entire area of the State. This gave to the settler an illusive idea of inexhaustible soil fertility that, during the 1830's, began to be dispelled. Cultivated fields began to erode and crop yields diminished. Such evidences of the coming exhaustion of the soil were closely associated in time with the rise of the agricultural associations. With the work of these associations came general recognition that upon stock breeding and the development of a varied livestock industry, rather than upon grain farming, depended the economic welfare of the State.