

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

Bracken County

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The eastern part of this county is very much of the same character as the western part of Mason county, and possesses a soil equally well adapted for the growth of the fine kinds of tobacco, for which purpose the hillsides, about the same level above the Ohio river, are generally selected. Several young vineyards have been planted out on the steep slopes of the hills near Augusta, having a south and southeast aspect; and the citizens of this part of the county entertain high hopes of the successful and profitable cultivation of the vine in their county. If this new branch of industry proves successful, there is no doubt but this is the very best purpose to which such lands can be applied; and this remark holds good for many districts of adjacent counties, situated on the blue limestone formation, where the hill-sides are abrupt and liable to wash from constant cultivation in grain.

A hill-side soil was selected for chemical analysis, in the vicinity of Augusta, such as is there most generally considered best for grape culture, over the testudinaria, Leptaena, and encrinital beds of the blue limestone formation of this county. When these analyses shall have been completed we shall be better prepared to pronounce on the adaptability of this soil for vine culture; but, judging from the character of the underlying rocks, there is every reason to believe that they will prove to be soils, not only rich in carbonate of lime, but, at the same time, sufficiently silicious to be warm, porous, and genial to the grape.

I believe all experience goes to show that the best "*dry wines*," such as are produced in the south of France, and the Xeres, Malaga, San Lucar Districts, of Spain, are warm, porous, calcareous soils, easily permeable to water, but still somewhat retentive, by its composition, and located with a good southern exposure on hill-sides, towards the middle of their slopes. Such is precisely the kind of soil which may be expected to result from the disintegration of alternations of the blue argillaceous limestone and silicious mudstones, not only of Bracken and Mason, but over a large portion of Nicholas, Pendleton, Harrison, Scott, Owen, Grant, Carrol, Gallatin, Boone, and Kenton. If the climate of Kentucky is not too variable the hill-sides in these counties, through which the rocks in question range, can undoubtedly be more profitably cultivated in vineyards than in any other way. By so doing, it is anticipated that the owner of the land will not only realize, ultimately, a fair return for his labor, but he will, undoubtedly, at the same time, beautify the face of the country, and prevent the the disastrous consequences which often follow the continued cultivation of land thus situated, in grain, by the washing away of the soil, and often the furrowing of the surface into unsightly bare gullies, that mar the prospect, and deteriorate the value of the property.

"The highly esteemed wines of the Cote d' Or are produced from vines grown on a calcareous soil; but the land which produces the Hermitage wine is derived from the debris of granite; silicious soils,

“interspersed with flints, furnish the celebrated wines of Chateau-Neuf, Ferte, and La Gaude; schistose districts afford also good wine, “for instance, that called *La Malgue*.” Thus it appears that soils, various in their chemical composition, produce wine; but each has its peculiar flavor and character, depending on the nature of the soil on which it is grown.

Wine is now coming into more general use in this country, every successive year, as a substitute for brandy, whiskey, and other strong intoxicating liquors; and there is no doubt that genuine good wine, used in moderation, is a wholesome beverage, at least for some constitutions. If by its introduction, the cause of temperance can, perhaps, be more effectually and permanently established, which is now the opinion of our most enlightened and intelligent citizens, vine growing would indeed be a blessing to the land, as well as a new source of industry and profit. Such being the case, the demand for native wines is now becoming established, and the products of the vineyard have a sure market, which is the principal step towards its successful cultivation.

In France the average price of vineyards has been estimated at two hundred dollars per acre; even at this price, and taking into account the frequent failure of the crop, it is still one of the most important and profitable branches of industry. It has been remarked, by those well acquainted with the wine growing districts of France, that though it requires four or five years after a vineyard is first planted, before it comes to perfection, and, though this branch of husbandry is liable to frequent vicissitudes from occasional unproductive seasons, that, nevertheless, there is scarcely any agricultural product that pays so well in the end.

The town of Xeres, in the southwestern part of Spain, is said to be one of the richest cities in that country, its commerce being chiefly derived from the fine quality of Sherry wine produced in the vicinity.

It is asserted by Mr. Nicholas Longworth, who has probably had more experience in native wines than any man in our country, that *must* obtained from the kind of grape that flourishes best in Ohio soil and climate, has a higher specific gravity than the *must* of the majority of European grapes. I am not informed as to what he has found to be the average specific gravity of the *must* of the western grapes, tried by him; but those who have an opportunity of ascertaining may com-

pare it with the following specific gravities of the *must* of grapes grown in different parts of Europe. In the south of France it will average 1.1283; in the district of the Neekar, Germany, from 1.050 to 1.090; in Heidelberg from 1.039 to 1.09.

Some trials were made this season of the specific gravity of the expressed juice of grapes, after straining through thin muslin, with the following results:

First specimen of Catawba, 1.0604; second specimen of Catawba, 1.0703, to 1.07027; one sample of Warren or Herbemont, 1.070; one specimen of Isabella, 1.050. This season, which has been a wet one, the juice of the grape is probably more watery than in the average of years, so that the average specific gravity would probably rise higher than the above figures. These grapes were grown in silicious loamy Wabash bottom soils, about a quarter of a mile from the base of a range of hills composed of silicious quarternary shell marl.

The aspect seems to be a very important consideration in laying off vineyards, as well as a judicious selection of soil.

In the celebrated wine districts of Montrachet, experience has shown that the middle part of the slope, with a southern exposure, produced by far the best flavored wine; the insulated parts towards the tops of the hills afford a wine which is less esteemed, and sells at a much lower price, while beneath, on the lower slopes, and in the surrounding plains, the vines afford still an inferior article of wine, and yet more indifferent on the opposite side of the hill. Similar differences are observed in the wine countries of Pomard, Volnay, Beaune, Nuits, Vougeot, Chambertin, Romane, &c. Almost everywhere it is observed that the reverse side of the hill, the summit and the plain, although apparently consisting of the same soil, afford inferior wine to the southern middle slope. It appears requisite that the vine, to flourish, must be able to push its roots into a warm dry place; and it seems to be advantageous, too, that it should be able to insinuate them amongst the interstices of a calcareous rock bottom.

The question, then, of the suitability of the climate of Kentucky becomes a matter of very great interest. From hints thrown out recently, by some of the Cincinnati papers, in regard to the present opinion of the Cincinnati Horticultural Society, they consider the seasons in Ohio as too variable—one winter too cold, the next too open

and warm; one summer is too dry and too hot, another too wet. It must be confessed that the last three years have been unfavorable for vine culture, and if we were to judge from these least three years we might come to the same conclusion; but opinions, based on the experience of previous years, are rather at variance with this view of the question; we ought, however, not to allow ourselves to be deceived in regard to this important question with reference to the raising of grapes; therefore, all those about to engage in the business would do well to investigate this subject for themselves, by informing themselves, personally, in regard to this matter, by visiting the oldest vineyards in the country, and ascertaining the facts of the case.

It is asserted that the oldest vineyards in the country, around Vevay, in Indiana, have been abandoned, and that more money can be made from land by raising grass, wheat, and corn, than by cultivating grapes. This may be all true, under certain conditions, but it may still be an open question under other circumstances. Since, in the first place, we have to consider whether the Vevaiana selected the kind of grape best suited to our climate; and we have also to consider the peculiar nature of the soil they selected, which I understand to have been bottom land. Steep hill-sides have been thought best adapted for grape culture in Kentucky. The question is can *such lands* be as profitably, or more profitably, put in grain and grass? I have seen many such a hill-side, reduced almost to hopeless barrenness-by the washing away of the soil, and the gulying out of the face of the slope. The hill sides, if well sodded in grass, would, undoubtedly, be valuable for growing wool, but at present, in consequence of the ravages of the multitude of dogs kept by the citizens, Kentucky is almost debarred the privilege of raising sheep.

The following reply to the discouraging reports of the Cincinnati Horticultural Society, on the vine culture of the United States, appears to me so just and so pertinent to the question at issue that I insert it here:

VINE CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES.

To the Editor of The N. Y. Tribune:

SIR: I noticed under the above title, in *The Weekly Tribune* of September 5, an extract from *The News*, published in Vevay, Indiana, which I wish to answer, for coming from a section of country which is considered properly the Vine region of the United States, it gives au-

thority to an error which needs correction. The writer regards it as a settled fact that the cultivation of grapes cannot be rendered general in this country. I would like to be informed what product of the soil there is, the cultivation of which could be rendered general in a literal sense, particularly what fruit can be grown to advantage in all sections of the United States. Soil and climate adapted to one product may be unfit for another. The writer attempts to prove too much. The cultivation of the vine cannot be said to be general even in Southern Europe. I apprehend that there are portions of land wholly unadapted and never planted to vineyards, even in the most celebrated vine regions of France and Germany. Nor can I conceive that their climate is any better adapted to the grape than ours. True, the weather there is more uniform than here, so that they have not to contend with mildew and rot as we have; but their grapes are often destroyed by early Autumn frosts. They have grapes adapted to their climate; we have grapes adapted to ours. I admit that our climate is more variable than theirs, our weather fickle and austere, and even in the most favorable locality so different from theirs that we can never raise foreign grapes in the open air. But we have native grape vines that withstand the severity of our northern latitude, and yield an abundant crop every season. And I trust that scientific men will, in a few years, by a process of amelioration, produce from our crude native stock varieties unequaled by Muscat or Chasselas.

There may be, and doubtless is, land in the Ohio river valley worth more to raise grass and corn and wheat than to raise grapes. But I believe there are portions of land, not only on the banks of the "Rhine of America," but in every section of the United States, better adapted to vineyards than anything else. I am too sanguine to believe that it would result in ruin to any man who should enter into the culture of the vine with a rational understanding of the habits of our native grapes and the soil, climate and treatment adapted to them.

Doubtless Mr. Longworth and many others would be gratified to learn that process of adulteration in the manufacture of wine to make a little go a good way. This assertion will be news to those acquainted with the celebrity of this gentleman's wine. But the manufacture of wine does not comprise the only value of grapes. If I remember correctly, the minimum wholesale price of Isabella grapes in New York City last season was seven cents per pound. At times the price was doubtless twice that sum. Mr. E. A. McKay, a grape-grower in Naples, N. Y., sold his entire crop last season in Buffalo and Montreal at an average of fourteen cents per pound; and a few years since he realized \$1,200 from the product of one acre. At these figures, to raise grapes for the table would be more profitable than making wine, even with that process of adulteration.

But what is the secret of failure to those who have attempted the culture of the vine in this country? Many have failed by attempting to cultivate foreign varieties, all of which are worthless for the open air in our climate; and when attention was directed to native grapes, those establishing vineyards would employ and rely upon the judgment of German vinedressers, who must do their work "choost as they did it in Charmany," forgetting that our native vines, unlike the foreign, put forth large, luxuriant leaves to protect the fruit from our more intense sun and those sudden changes so fatal to the foreign grape, and to mature a more hardy wood to endure our Winters. The Swiss at Vevay planted their vineyards on the rich bottom lands. The result was what any intelligent cultivator might expect, an enormous growth of wood and but little fruit. Those farmers have acted wisely to destroy such vineyards, and devote the land to other purposes. But the few vineyards left in that vicinity are of native grapes upon hill sides, and I believe are in a flourishing condition.

Respectfully,

A.

EGYPT, N. Y., *September 9, 1857.*

In this connection I would also state an important fact bearing on this subject: that in the wine districts of the Neckar, a full crop of grapes is only obtained once in ten years, and yet wine growing pays in that part of Germany.

At all events the practicability in this country, of successful grape culture, is well worthy of the serious consideration of the land owners of the commonwealth.

There are three principal varieties of soil in Bracken county: the argillo-calcareous and silico-calcareous soils, of the middle slopes of the hill-sides, supporting a mixed growth of sugar-tree, walnut, hickory, interspersed with black and white ash, oak, buckeye, and wild cherry; the oak land proper of the ridges and table lands, and the bottom lands. The former prevail principally east of the Augusta and Powersville turnpike; the oak-land in the southwest part of the county, bordering along the Newport trace, where the large white oak flourishes, intermixed with red and black oak.

It is the sugar-tree, hickory, and sassafrass land that brings tobacco of the finest quality; but the black oak land is also excellent tobacco land. The tobacco grown on the best tobacco soils of Bracken and Mason is remarkable for the fine texture, glossy appearance, and freedom from the gummy principle which deteriorates the coarser qualities of this plant. After a few years cultivation the best tobacco soils lose

some of the properties necessary to produce the finest quality of silky tobacco, which it seems difficult to restore. Perhaps the chemical analysis of some of the exhausted tobacco soils may throw light on this matter. They will probably show, for one thing, a loss of soluble potash salts. A fresh disintegration of the soil and green crops seem, after a time, partially to restore the fine tobacco producing quality. A virgin tobacco soil was collected in this county for chemical analysis.

From four to five feet below the surface of the alluvial plain, on which Augusta stands, innumerable quantities of human bodies, of aboriginal races, are entombed. So abundant are they, that in digging a cellar under one of the houses from fifty to sixty skeletons were found. An exceedingly rich black shell earth is also frequently turned up in some of the gardens, by the spade and plough; they are river shells such as now exist in the Ohio river, viz: several different kinds of *Unio* and *Paludina*. From their position here, in a rich black earth, both in the Augusta bottom, and in the same material in a high situation in the cut-off hills of the Lower Wabash in Indiana, more than one hundred feet above the bottom lands, I am convinced that in seasons of scarcity these moluscs served as an article of diet, and this black shell earth is the site of aboriginal dung hills, where the shells were cast away after the repast on this singular food; that which lends probability to this inference is the fact of bones of deer, elk, opossums, raccoons, and other animals occurring in the same black earth associated with the shells. The richness of the soil, the great elevation at which the same shell earth has been found in Indiana, as well as its local circumscribed area, forbids the idea of its being a river deposit.

The human bones are generally surrounded by a black clay or loam, and are mostly in so tender and decomposed a condition that it is difficult to exhume them entire.

Near the toll-gate, five miles from Augusta, on the Germantown road, the *O. testudinaria* beds are well developed, associated with silicious mudstone. Here the growth is beech and oak.

The Willow creek oak-lands, and most of the country lying between the Germantown turnpike and the Mason line, are good tobacco lands.

Near the head of Locust creek there is a considerable quantity of silicious mudstone, interstratified with *testudinaria* and *Leptaena* lime-

stone; here the growth is chiefly oak and hickory; this is part of the same ridge of oak-land, previously spoken of, which extends for a long distance through Pendleton county, following the strike of these members of the blue limestone formation, and is prolonged, eastwardly, to Washington, in Mason county, along the nearly continuous ridge, known as the Newport trace.

Some very singular impressions were noticed near the heads of Locust creek, in the mudstones, having much the appearance as if wires, terminated by small balls, had left their impress on the rocks.

A virgin tobacco soil was selected from Bracken county for chemical analysis, in the vicinity of Augusta, where the growth is sugar-tree, walnut, white oak, buckeye, elm, sassafrass, and hickory; undergrowth, sassafrass and ironwood. Time has not yet permitted the analysis of this soil.