

SEPTEMBER 19,1974

Early autumn is touching the Shortgrass Country. Mornings are brisk dew laden scenes. Late evenings are decorated by orange sunsets. The apprehensions of the calamities that beset us all are calmed by natural beauty of green grass and fat calves.

Old timers claim that this land the Indians called "Big Chestnut" is ruined by too many beautiful sunsets and star filled nights. The old greybeards, you know, were mighty greedy for rain storms and thunderclaps. Rare was there one who thought of an easel or a brush as the sun set or rose on dry ground.

Indians, in contrast, loved the sky. Being savages, they also worshipped the land for the food they received from it. Indians were such dumb-heads that they made up different gods to honor for the different benefits they received from the Earth. Also, being primitives, they only took from the land what they needed to eat or wear. It was the white man's culture that brought the plow and the fence and the havoc of spoiled worn-out earth to be restored by scientific methods. Had the uneducated tribes stayed in control of the resources, fertilizer companies would be unknown to this day.

Some of the primitives were not as shortsighted as others. At one time there lived a prince of a thinker "Garter Brain." Orchard or garden planning threw him into near trances. On a dry buffalo hide, in paint, he could design brilliant terraces hundreds of years ahead of the times.

Garter realized that the man did not need to be limited by rainfall. He could foresee big rivers and small creeks being diverted into well engineered irrigation systems. Fertile fields were developed by a mere stroke of his brush; bonanzas of grain appeared at a whisper of his gifted tongue.

At the tribal sessions, Garter dangled his ideas before the chiefs in eloquence that turned the plains into glistening pearls of riches that would transform these migrant hunters into prosperous planters.

Garter didn't actually plant any seeds or dig any ditches, yet he could hold his audience spellbound as his visions of rich cornfields bordered by succulent squash were verbally cast upon the gatherings.

Within the same tribe, there lived an Indian unblessed by any of the talents of Garter Brain, whose name was "Low Mustard." Low Mustard was a silent hunter, a very good one at that. Throughout his life, children jeered as he passed through the village. No chiefs invited him to the councils, nor did any squaws cast coy momma Indian looks in his direction.

Low Mustard's popularity was limited to his overflowing smokehouse and his piles of furs and hides. Low could have turned the Gettysburg Address into a stuttering, blundering speech. Other than during the "moons of the hollow stomachs," the braves marked Low Mustard as a near village idiot, if not a full fledged nut.

Of all things to happen, this simple hunter was to be the downfall of the great Garter Brain. Things were no different then than now. You know how many cases there are of powerful gladiators being felled by a vegetable peel that came from the underside of a vine. You know how many beautiful and precious objects that have been blighted by the bright sunshine. And I'm sure you've observed how fast a sudden frost can kill back a flower garden, yet leave the lowly turnip unharmed.

It happened like this: one day Low Mustard was dragging a huge chunk of buffalo loin to a fire of perfectly laid ashes. Garter Brain was drawn to the scene by the excellent chance of a feast. But to preserve his dignity he approached the fire and asked, "Oh namesake of mustard and hunter of skunks, why do you hunt buffalo when you could sit in the council room and learn to grow squash and corn?"

A sudden change hit Low Mustard. As if the gods had polished and loosened his tongue, he replied, "Oh, maker of great plains and no food, life is not sustained by the tongue that wags by the fire, but by the tongue that broils on the coals. Foolish I am known by the whole village. My back wearies from carrying in heavy loads of meat, yet the calluses of my body are from the fruits of the bow string, not from bending and stooping in a hot field."

Garter Brain entertained the tribe by mocking and re-mocking the words of Low Mustard. Laughter, you know, can grow hollow from thought. More and more the appeal of digging and planting fell to the side.

Squaws will carry water to the vines. Kids can be utilized to pull weeds from the rows. Nevertheless, if the ground lies unbroken then no one has to even give a command.

Man did go on and plow up the virgin land. Farms were laid out in areas that the buffalo once avoided to save his strength. Tongues still wag in the council rooms. Man, however, still holds baked beef tongue in high regard.