

# Script of *The Plow That Broke the Plains*

## I: PROLOGUE

**T**his is a record of land ...  
of soil, rather than people -  
a story of the Great Plains:  
the 400,000 acres of wind-swept grass lands that spread up from the Texas Panhandle to Canada,  
A high, treeless continent,  
without rivers, without streams . . .  
A country of high winds, and sun . . .  
and of little rain ...

## II: GRASS

**T**he grass lands ...  
a treeless wind-swept continent of grass stretching from the broad Texas Panhandle  
up to the mountain reaches of Montana  
and to the Canadian border.  
A country of high winds and sun ...

## III: CATTLE

**F**irst came the cattle...  
an unfenced range a thousand miles long ...  
an uncharted ocean of grass,  
the southern range for winter grazing and the mountain plateaus for summer.  
It was a cattleman's Paradise.  
Up from the Rio Grande ...  
in from the rolling prairies ...  
down clear from the eastern highways the cattle rolled into the old buffalo range.  
For a decade the world discovered the grasslands and poured cattle into the plains.  
The railroads brought markets to the edge of the plains . . .  
land syndicates sprang up overnight and the cattle rolled into the West.

## IV: HOMESTEADER

**B**ut the railroad brought the world into the plains . . .  
new populations, new needs crowded the last frontier.  
Once again the plowman followed the herds and the pioneer came to the plains.  
Make way for the plowman!  
High winds and sun . . .  
High winds and sun. . . .

a country without rivers and with little rain.  
Settler, plow at your peril!

## **V: WARNING**

**M**any were disappointed.  
The rains failed . . .  
and the sun baked the light soil.  
Many left . . .  
they fought the loneliness and the hard years ...  
But the rains failed them.

## **VI: WAR**

**M**any were disappointed, but the great day was coming . . .  
The day of new causes - new profits - new hopes.  
"Wheat will win the war!"  
"Plant wheat . . ."  
"Plant the cattle ranges ... "  
"Plant your vacant lots ... plant wheat!"  
"Wheat for the boys over there!"  
"Wheat for the Allies!"  
"Wheat for the British!"  
"Wheat for the Belgians!"  
"Wheat for the French!"  
"Wheat at any price"  
"Wheat will win the war!"

## **VII: BLUES**

**T**hen we reaped the golden harvest. . .  
then we really plowed the plains. . .  
we turned under millions of new acres for war.  
We had the man-power . . .  
we invented new machinery . . .  
the world was our market.  
By 1933 the old grass lands had become the new wheat lands . . .  
a hundred million acres ...  
two hundred million acres ...  
More wheat!

## **VIII: DROUGHT**

**A** country without rivers...

without streams with little rain...

Once again the rains held off and the sun baked the earth.

This time no grass held moisture against the winds and sun ...

this time millions of acres of plowed land lay open to the sun.

## **IX: DEVASTATION**

**B**aked out-blown out-and broke!

Year in, year out, uncomplaining they fought the worst drought in history.

Their stock choked to death on the barren land...

their homes were nightmares of swirling dust night and day.

Many were ahead of it - but many stayed until stock, machinery, homes, credit, food, and even hope were gone.

On to the West!

Once again they headed into the setting sun ...

Once again they headed West out of the Great Plains

and hit the highways for the Pacific Coast, the last border.

Blown out - baked out - and broke ...

nothing to stay for ...nothing to hope for...

homeless, penniless and bewildered they joined the great army of the highways.

No place to go...and no place to stop.

Nothing to eat...nothing to do...

their homes on four wheels...

their work desperate gamble for a day's labor in the fields along the highways...

The price of a sack of beans or a tank of gas ...

All they ask is a chance to start over ...

And a chance for their children to eat,

to have medical care, to have homes again.

50,000 a month!

The sun and winds wrote the most tragic chapter in American agriculture.

*Reaping the Golden Harvest: Pare Lorentz (Poet and Filmmaker).*

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~1930s/FILM/lorentz/plowscript.html>.