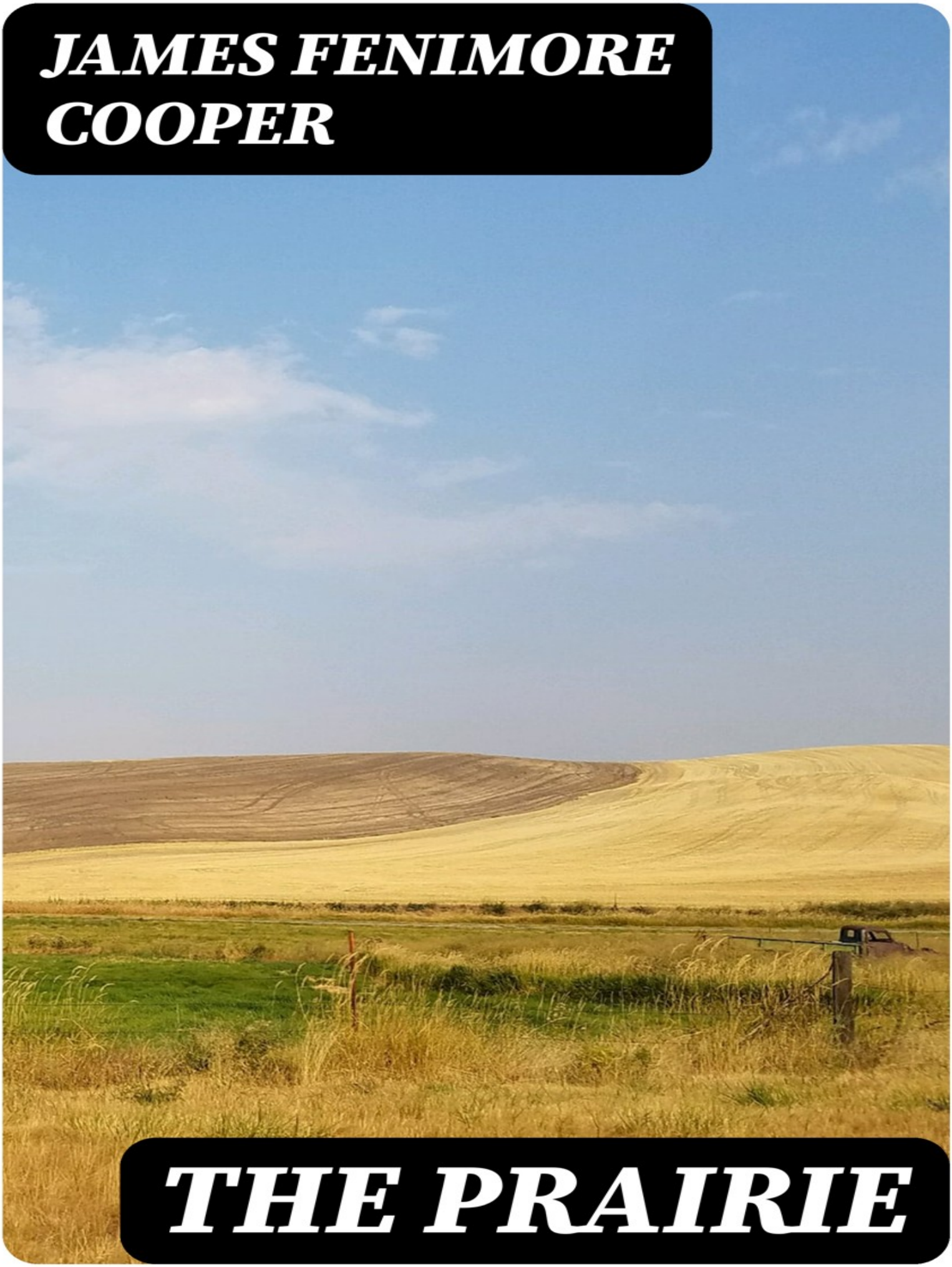
JAMES FENIMORE COOPER



THE PRAIRIE

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EAN 8596547023647

DigiCat, 2022
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INTRODUCTION

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“The Prairie” was the third in order of Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales. Its first appearance was in the year 1827. The idea of the story had suggested itself to him, we are told, before he had finished its immediate forerunner, “The Last of the Mohicans.” He chose entirely new scenes for it, “resolved to cross the Mississippi and wander over the desolate wastes of the remote Western prairies.” He had been taking every chance that came of making a personal acquaintance with the Indian chiefs of the western tribes who were to be encountered about this period on their way in the frequent Indian embassies to Washington. “He saw much to command his admiration,” says Mrs. Cooper, “in these wild braves... It was a matter of course that in drawing Indian character he should dwell on the better traits of the picture, rather than on the coarser and more revolting though more common points. Like West, he could see the Apollo in the young Mohawk.”

When in July, 1826, Cooper landed in England with his wife and family, he carried his Indian memories and associations with him. They crossed to France, and ascended the Seine by steamboat, and then settled for a time in Paris. Of their quarters there in the Rue St. Maur, Sarah Fenimore Cooper writes:

“It was thoroughly French in character. There was a short, narrow, gloomy lane or street, shut in between lofty dwelling houses, the lane often dark, always filthy, without sidewalks, a gutter running through the centre, over which,

suspended from a rope, hung a dim oil lamp or two—such was the Rue St. Maur, in the Faubourg St. Germain. It was a gloomy approach certainly. But a tall porte cochere opened, and suddenly the whole scene changed. Within those high walls, so forbidding in aspect, there lay charming gardens, gay with parterres of flowers, and shaded by noble trees, not only those belonging to the house itself, but those of other adjoining dwellings of the same character—one looked over park-like grounds covering some acres. The hotel itself, standing on the street, was old, and built on a grand scale; it had been the home of a French ducal family in the time of Louis XIV. The rooms on the two lower floors were imposing and spacious; with ceilings of great height, gilded wainscoting and various quaint little medallion pictures of shepherds and shepherdesses, and other fancies of the time of Madame de Sevigne. Those little shepherds were supposed to have looked down upon *la mere beaute*, and upon *la plus jolie fille de France* as she danced her incomparable minuets. Those grand saloons were now devoted to the humble service of a school for young ladies. But on the third floor, to which one ascended by a fine stone stairway, broad and easy, with elaborate iron railings, there was a more simple set of rooms, comfortably furnished, where the American family were pleasantly provided for, in a home of their own. Unwilling to separate from his children, who were placed at the school, the traveller adopted this plan that he might be near them. One of the rooms, overlooking the garden, and opening on a small terrace, became his study. He was soon at work. In his writing-desk lay some chapters of a new novel. The MS. had crossed the

ocean with him, though but little had been added to its pages during the wanderings of the English and French journeys.”

When, some months later, the story appeared, its effect was immediate on both sides the Atlantic. It is worth note that during his French visit Cooper met Sir Walter Scott. Cooper was born at Burlington, New Jersey, 15th Sept., 1789, and died at Cooperstown, New York (which took its name from his father), 14th Sept., 1851.

The following is his literary record:

Precaution, 1820; The Spy, 1821; The Pioneers, 1823; The Pilot, 1823; Lionel Lincoln, or the Leaguer of Boston, 1825; The Last of the Mohicans, 1826; The Prairie, 1827; The Red Rover, 1828; Notions of the Americans, 1828; The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish, 1829; The Water-witch, 1830; The Bravo, 1831; The Heidenmauer, or the Benedictines, 1832; The Headsman, 1833; A Letter to his Countrymen, 1834; The Monikins, 1835; Sketches of Switzerland, 1836; Gleanings in Europe: 1837; (England) 1837; (Italy) 1838; The American Democrat, 1838; Homeward Bound, 1838; The Chronicles of Cooperstown, 1838; Home as Found (Eve Effingham), 1839; History of the U. S. Navy, 1839; The Pathfinder, or the Inland Sea, 1840; Mercedes of Castile, 1841; The Deerslayer, or the First Warpath, 1841; The Two Admirals, 1842; The Wing-and-Wing (Jack o Lantern), 1842; The Battle of Lake Erie, or Answers to Messrs. Burges, Duer and Mackenzie, 1843; The French Governess; or, The Embroidered Handkerchief, 1843; Richard Dale, 1843; Wyandotte, 1843; Ned Myers, or Life before the Mast, 1843; Afloat and Ashore (Miles Wallingford, Lucy Hardinge), two

series, 1844; Proceedings of the Naval Court-Martial in the Case of Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, etc., 1844; Santanstoe, 1845; The Chainbearer, 1846; Lives of Distinguished American Naval Officers, 1846; The Red Skins, 1846; The Crater (Marks Reef), 1847; Captain Spike, or the Islets of the Gulf, 1848; Jack Tier, or the Florida Reefs, 1848; The Oak Openings, or the Bee-Hunter, 1848; The Sea Lions, 1849; The Ways of the Hour, 1850.

Ernest Rhys 1907

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

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The geological formation of that portion of the American Union, which lies between the Alleghanies and the Rocky Mountains, has given rise to many ingenious theories. Virtually, the whole of this immense region is a plain. For a distance extending nearly 1500 miles east and west, and 600 north and south, there is scarcely an elevation worthy to be called a mountain. Even hills are not common; though a good deal of the face of the country has more or less of that “rolling” character, which is described in the opening pages of this work.

There is much reason to believe, that the territory which now composes Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and a large

portion of the country west of the Mississippi, lay formerly under water. The soil of all the former states has the appearance of an alluvial deposit; and isolated rocks have been found, of a nature and in situations which render it difficult to refute the opinion that they have been transferred to their present beds by floating ice. This theory assumes that the Great Lakes were the deep pools of one immense body of fresh water, which lay too low to be drained by the irruption that laid bare the land.

It will be remembered that the French, when masters of the Canadas and Louisiana, claimed the whole of the territory in question. Their hunters and advanced troops held the first communications with the savage occupants, and the earliest written accounts we possess of these vast regions, are from the pens of their missionaries. Many French words have, consequently, become of local use in this quarter of America, and not a few names given in that language have been perpetuated. When the adventurers, who first penetrated these wilds, met, in the centre of the forests, immense plains, covered with rich verdure or rank grasses, they naturally gave them the appellation of meadows. As the English succeeded the French, and found a peculiarity of nature, differing from all they had yet seen on the continent, already distinguished by a word that did not express any thing in their own language, they left these natural meadows in possession of their title of convention. In this manner has the word “Prairie” been adopted into the English tongue.

The American prairies are of two kinds. Those which lie east of the Mississippi are comparatively small, are

exceedingly fertile, and are always surrounded by forests. They are susceptible of high cultivation, and are fast becoming settled. They abound in Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana. They labour under the disadvantages of a scarcity of wood and water,—evils of a serious character, until art has had time to supply the deficiencies of nature. As coal is said to abound in all that region, and wells are generally successful, the enterprise of the emigrants is gradually prevailing against these difficulties.

The second description of these natural meadows lies west of the Mississippi, at a distance of a few hundred miles from that river, and is called the Great Prairies. They resemble the steppes of Tartary more than any other known portion of Christendom; being, in fact, a vast country, incapable of sustaining a dense population, in the absence of the two great necessaries already named. Rivers abound, it is true; but this region is nearly destitute of brooks and the smaller water courses, which tend so much to comfort and fertility.

The origin and date of the Great American Prairies form one of natures most majestic mysteries. The general character of the United States, of the Canadas, and of Mexico, is that of luxuriant fertility. It would be difficult to find another portion of the world, of the same extent, which has so little useless land as the inhabited parts of the American Union. Most of the mountains are arable, and even the prairies, in this section of the republic, are of deep alluvion. The same is true between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific. Between the two lies the broad belt, of comparative desert, which is the scene of this tale,

appearing to interpose a barrier to the progress of the American people westward.

The Great Prairies appear to be the final gathering place of the red men. The remnants of the Mohicans, and the Delawares, of the Creeks, Choctaws, and Cherokees, are destined to fulfil their time on these vast plains. The entire number of the Indians, within the Union, is differently computed, at between one and three hundred thousand souls. Most of them inhabit the country west of the Mississippi. At the period of the tale, they dwelt in open hostility; national feuds passing from generation to generation. The power of the republic has done much to restore peace to these wild scenes, and it is now possible to travel in security, where civilised man did not dare to pass unprotected five-and-twenty years ago.

The reader, who has perused the two former works, of which this is the natural successor, will recognise an old acquaintance in the principal character of the story. We have here brought him to his end, and we trust he will be permitted to slumber in the peace of the just.

J. F. Cooper Paris June 1832

THE PRAIRIE

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CHAPTER I.

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I pray thee, shepherd, if that love or gold,
Can in this desert place buy entertainment,
Bring us where we may rest ourselves and feed.
—As you like it.

Much was said and written, at the time, concerning the policy of adding the vast regions of Louisiana, to the already immense and but half-tenanted territories of the United States. As the warmth of controversy however subsided, and party considerations gave place to more liberal views, the wisdom of the measure began to be generally conceded. It soon became apparent to the meanest capacity, that, while nature had placed a barrier of desert to the extension of our population in the west, the measure had made us the masters of a belt of fertile country, which, in the revolutions of the day, might have become the property of a rival nation. It gave us the sole command of the great thoroughfare of the interior, and placed the countless tribes of savages, who lay along our borders, entirely within our control; it reconciled conflicting rights, and quieted national distrusts; it opened a thousand avenues to the inland trade, and to the waters of the Pacific; and, if ever time or necessity shall require a peaceful division of this vast empire, it assures us of a neighbour that will possess our language, our religion, our institutions, and it is also to be hoped, our sense of political justice.

Although the purchase was made in 1803, the spring of the succeeding year was permitted to open, before the

official prudence of the Spaniard, who held the province for his European master, admitted the authority, or even of the entrance of its new proprietors. But the forms of the transfer were no sooner completed, and the new government acknowledged, than swarms of that restless people, which is ever found hovering on the skirts of American society, plunged into the thickets that fringed the right bank of the Mississippi, with the same careless hardihood, as had already sustained so many of them in their toilsome progress from the Atlantic states, to the eastern shores of the “father of rivers.”[*]

[*] The Mississippi is thus termed in several of the Indian languages.

The reader will gain a more just idea of the importance of this stream, if he recalls to mind the fact, that the Missouri and the Mississippi are properly the same river. Their united lengths cannot be greatly short of four thousand miles.

Time was necessary to blend the numerous and affluent colonists of the lower province with their new compatriots; but the thinner and more humble population above, was almost immediately swallowed in the vortex which attended the tide of instant emigration. The inroad from the east was a new and sudden out-breaking of a people, who had endured a momentary restraint, after having been rendered nearly resistless by success. The toils and hazards of former undertakings were forgotten, as these endless and unexplored regions, with all their fancied as well as real advantages, were laid open to their enterprise. The consequences were such as might easily have been anticipated, from so tempting an offering, placed, as it was,

before the eyes of a race long trained in adventure and nurtured in difficulties.

Thousands of the elders, of what were then called the New States[*], broke up from the enjoyment of their hard-earned indulgences, and were to be seen leading long files of descendants, born and reared in the forests of Ohio and Kentucky, deeper into the land, in quest of that which might be termed, without the aid of poetry, their natural and more congenial atmosphere. The distinguished and resolute forester who first penetrated the wilds of the latter state, was of the number. This adventurous and venerable patriarch was now seen making his last remove; placing the “endless river” between him and the multitude his own success had drawn around him, and seeking for the renewal of enjoyments which were rendered worthless in his eyes, when trammelled by the forms of human institutions.[+]

[*] All the states admitted to the American Union, since the revolution, are called New States, with the exception of Vermont:
that had claims before the war; which were not, however, admitted
until a later day.

[+] Colonel Boon, the patriarch of Kentucky. This venerable and hardy
pioneer of civilisation emigrated to an estate three hundred miles
west of the Mississippi, in his ninety-second year, because he
found a population of ten to the square mile, inconveniently crowded!

In the pursuit of adventures such as these, men are ordinarily governed by their habits or deluded by their

wishes. A few, led by the phantoms of hope, and ambitious of sudden affluence, sought the mines of the virgin territory; but by far the greater portion of the emigrants were satisfied to establish themselves along the margins of the larger water-courses, content with the rich returns that the generous, alluvial, bottoms of the rivers never fail to bestow on the most desultory industry. In this manner were communities formed with magical rapidity; and most of those who witnessed the purchase of the empty empire, have lived to see already a populous and sovereign state, parcelled from its inhabitants, and received into the bosom of the national Union, on terms of political equality.

The incidents and scenes which are connected with this legend, occurred in the earliest periods of the enterprises which have led to so great and so speedy a result.

The harvest of the first year of our possession had long been passed, and the fading foliage of a few scattered trees was already beginning to exhibit the hues and tints of autumn, when a train of wagons issued from the bed of a dry rivulet, to pursue its course across the undulating surface, of what, in the language of the country of which we write, is called a “rolling prairie.” The vehicles, loaded with household goods and implements of husbandry, the few straggling sheep and cattle that were herded in the rear, and the rugged appearance and careless mien of the sturdy men who loitered at the sides of the lingering teams, united to announce a band of emigrants seeking for the Elderado of the West. Contrary to the usual practice of the men of their caste, this party had left the fertile bottoms of the low country, and had found its way, by means only known to

such adventurers, across glen and torrent, over deep morasses and arid wastes, to a point far beyond the usual limits of civilised habitations. In their front were stretched those broad plains, which extend, with so little diversity of character, to the bases of the Rocky Mountains; and many long and dreary miles in their rear, foamed the swift and turbid waters of La Platte.

The appearance of such a train, in that bleak and solitary place, was rendered the more remarkable by the fact, that the surrounding country offered so little, that was tempting to the cupidity of speculation, and, if possible, still less that was flattering to the hopes of an ordinary settler of new lands.

The meagre herbage of the prairie, promised nothing, in favour of a hard and unyielding soil, over which the wheels of the vehicles rattled as lightly as if they travelled on a beaten road; neither wagons nor beasts making any deeper impression, than to mark that bruised and withered grass, which the cattle plucked, from time to time, and as often rejected, as food too sour, for even hunger to render palatable.

Whatever might be the final destination of these adventurers, or the secret causes of their apparent security in so remote and unprotected a situation, there was no visible sign of uneasiness, uncertainty, or alarm, among them. Including both sexes, and every age, the number of the party exceeded twenty.

At some little distance in front of the whole, marched the individual, who, by his position and air, appeared to be the leader of the band. He was a tall, sun-burnt, man, past the

middle age, of a dull countenance and listless manner. His frame appeared loose and flexible; but it was vast, and in reality of prodigious power. It was, only at moments, however, as some slight impediment opposed itself to his loitering progress, that his person, which, in its ordinary gait seemed so lounging and nerveless, displayed any of those energies, which lay latent in his system, like the slumbering and unwieldy, but terrible, strength of the elephant. The inferior lineaments of his countenance were coarse, extended and vacant; while the superior, or those nobler parts which are thought to affect the intellectual being, were low, receding and mean.

The dress of this individual was a mixture of the coarsest vestments of a husbandman with the leathern garments, that fashion as well as use, had in some degree rendered necessary to one engaged in his present pursuits. There was, however, a singular and wild display of prodigal and ill judged ornaments, blended with his motley attire. In place of the usual deer-skin belt, he wore around his body a tarnished silken sash of the most gaudy colours; the buck-horn haft of his knife was profusely decorated with plates of silver; the marten's fur of his cap was of a fineness and shadowing that a queen might covet; the buttons of his rude and soiled blanket-coat were of the glittering coinage of Mexico; the stock of his rifle was of beautiful mahogany, riveted and banded with the same precious metal, and the trinkets of no less than three worthless watches dangled from different parts of his person. In addition to the pack and the rifle which were slung at his back, together with the well filled, and carefully guarded pouch and horn, he had

carelessly cast a keen and bright wood-axe across his shoulder, sustaining the weight of the whole with as much apparent ease, as if he moved, unfettered in limb, and free from incumbrance.

A short distance in the rear of this man, came a group of youths very similarly attired, and bearing sufficient resemblance to each other, and to their leader, to distinguish them as the children of one family. Though the youngest of their number could not much have passed the period, that, in the nicer judgment of the law, is called the age of discretion, he had proved himself so far worthy of his progenitors as to have reared already his aspiring person to the standard height of his race. There were one or two others, of different mould, whose descriptions must however be referred to the regular course of the narrative.

Of the females, there were but two who had arrived at womanhood; though several white-headed, olive-skinned faces were peering out of the foremost wagon of the train, with eyes of lively curiosity and characteristic animation. The elder of the two adults, was the sallow and wrinkled mother of most of the party, and the younger was a sprightly, active, girl, of eighteen, who in figure, dress, and mien, seemed to belong to a station in society several gradations above that of any one of her visible associates. The second vehicle was covered with a top of cloth so tightly drawn, as to conceal its contents, with the nicest care. The remaining wagons were loaded with such rude furniture and other personal effects, as might be supposed to belong to one, ready at any moment to change his abode, without reference to season or distance.

Perhaps there was little in this train, or in the appearance of its proprietors, that is not daily to be encountered on the highways of this changeable and moving country. But the solitary and peculiar scenery, in which it was so unexpectedly exhibited, gave to the party a marked character of wildness and adventure.

In the little valleys, which, in the regular formation of the land, occurred at every mile of their progress, the view was bounded, on two of the sides, by the gradual and low elevations, which gave name to the description of prairie we have mentioned; while on the others, the meagre prospect ran off in long, narrow, barren perspectives, but slightly relieved by a pitiful show of coarse, though somewhat luxuriant vegetation. From the summits of the swells, the eye became fatigued with the sameness and chilling dreariness of the landscape. The earth was not unlike the Ocean, when its restless waters are heaving heavily, after the agitation and fury of the tempest have begun to lessen. There was the same waving and regular surface, the same absence of foreign objects, and the same boundless extent to the view. Indeed so very striking was the resemblance between the water and the land, that, however much the geologist might sneer at so simple a theory, it would have been difficult for a poet not to have felt, that the formation of the one had been produced by the subsiding dominion of the other. Here and there a tall tree rose out of the bottoms, stretching its naked branches abroad, like some solitary vessel; and, to strengthen the delusion, far in the distance, appeared two or three rounded thickets, looming in the misty horizon like islands resting on the waters. It is

unnecessary to warn the practised reader, that the sameness of the surface, and the low stands of the spectators, exaggerated the distances; but, as swell appeared after swell, and island succeeded island, there was a disheartening assurance that long, and seemingly interminable, tracts of territory must be passed, before the wishes of the humblest agriculturist could be realised.

Still, the leader of the emigrants steadily pursued his way, with no other guide than the sun, turning his back resolutely on the abodes of civilisation, and plunging, at each step, more deeply if not irretrievably, into the haunts of the barbarous and savage occupants of the country. As the day drew nigher to a close, however, his mind, which was, perhaps, incapable of maturing any connected system of forethought, beyond that which related to the interests of the present moment, became, in some slight degree, troubled with the care of providing for the wants of the hours of darkness.

On reaching the crest of a swell that was a little higher than the usual elevations, he lingered a minute, and cast a half curious eye, on either hand, in quest of those well known signs, which might indicate a place, where the three grand requisites of water, fuel and fodder were to be obtained in conjunction.

It would seem that his search was fruitless; for after a few moments of indolent and listless examination, he suffered his huge frame to descend the gentle declivity, in the same sluggish manner that an over fatted beast would have yielded to the downward pressure.

His example was silently followed by those who succeeded him, though not until the young men had manifested much more of interest, if not of concern in the brief enquiry, which each, in his turn, made on gaining the same look-out. It was now evident, by the tardy movements both of beasts and men, that the time of necessary rest was not far distant. The matted grass of the lower land, presented obstacles which fatigue began to render formidable, and the whip was becoming necessary to urge the lingering teams to their labour. At this moment, when, with the exception of the principal individual, a general lassitude was getting the mastery of the travellers, and every eye was cast, by a sort of common impulse, wistfully forward, the whole party was brought to a halt, by a spectacle, as sudden as it was unexpected.

The sun had fallen below the crest of the nearest wave of the prairie, leaving the usual rich and glowing train on its track. In the centre of this flood of fiery light, a human form appeared, drawn against the gilded background, as distinctly, and seemingly as palpable, as though it would come within the grasp of any extended hand. The figure was colossal; the attitude musing and melancholy, and the situation directly in the route of the travellers. But imbedded, as it was, in its setting of garish light, it was impossible to distinguish its just proportions or true character.

The effect of such a spectacle was instantaneous and powerful. The man in front of the emigrants came to a stand, and remained gazing at the mysterious object, with a dull interest, that soon quickened into superstitious awe. His

sons, so soon as the first emotions of surprise had a little abated, drew slowly around him, and, as they who governed the teams gradually followed their example, the whole party was soon condensed in one, silent, and wondering group. Notwithstanding the impression of a supernatural agency was very general among the travellers, the ticking of gun-locks was heard, and one or two of the bolder youths cast their rifles forward, in readiness for service.

“Send the boys off to the right,” exclaimed the resolute wife and mother, in a sharp, dissonant voice; “I warrant me, Asa, or Abner will give some account of the creature!”

“It may be well enough, to try the rifle,” muttered a dull looking man, whose features, both in outline and expression, bore no small resemblance to the first speaker, and who loosened the stock of his piece and brought it dexterously to the front, while delivering this opinion; “the Pawnee Loups are said to be hunting by hundreds in the plains; if so, they'll never miss a single man from their tribe.”

“Stay!” exclaimed a soft toned, but alarmed female voice, which was easily to be traced to the trembling lips of the younger of the two women; “we are not altogether; it may be a friend!”

“Who is scouting, now?” demanded the father, scanning, at the same time, the cluster of his stout sons, with a displeased and sullen eye. “Put by the piece, put by the piece;” he continued, diverting the other's aim, with the finger of a giant, and with the air of one it might be dangerous to deny. “My job is not yet ended; let us finish the little that remains, in peace.”

The man, who had manifested so hostile an intention, appeared to understand the other's allusion, and suffered himself to be diverted from his object. The sons turned their inquiring looks on the girl, who had so eagerly spoken, to require an explanation; but, as if content with the respite she had obtained for the stranger, she sunk back, in her seat, and chose to affect a maidenly silence.

In the mean time, the hues of the heavens had often changed. In place of the brightness, which had dazzled the eye, a gray and more sober light had succeeded, and as the setting lost its brilliancy, the proportions of the fanciful form became less exaggerated, and finally distinct. Ashamed to hesitate, now that the truth was no longer doubtful, the leader of the party resumed his journey, using the precaution, as he ascended the slight acclivity, to release his own rifle from the strap, and to cast it into a situation more convenient for sudden use.

There was little apparent necessity, however, for such watchfulness. From the moment when it had thus unaccountably appeared, as it were, between the heavens and the earth, the stranger's figure had neither moved nor given the smallest evidence of hostility. Had he harboured any such evil intention, the individual who now came plainly into view, seemed but little qualified to execute them.

A frame that had endured the hardships of more than eighty seasons, was not qualified to awaken apprehension, in the breast of one as powerful as the emigrant. Notwithstanding his years, and his look of emaciation, if not of suffering, there was that about this solitary being, however, which said that time, and not disease, had laid his

hand heavily on him. His form had withered, but it was not wasted. The sinews and muscles, which had once denoted great strength, though shrunken, were still visible; and his whole figure had attained an appearance of induration, which, if it were not for the well known frailty of humanity, would have seemed to bid defiance to the further approaches of decay. His dress was chiefly of skins, worn with the hair to the weather; a pouch and horn were suspended from his shoulders; and he leaned on a rifle of uncommon length, but which, like its owner, exhibited the wear of long and hard service.

As the party drew nigher to this solitary being, and came within a distance to be heard, a low growl issued from the grass at his feet, and then, a tall, gaunt, toothless, hound, arose lazily from his lair, and shaking himself, made some show of resisting the nearer approach of the travellers.

“Down, Hector, down,” said his master, in a voice, that was a little tremulous and hollow with age. “What have ye to do, pup, with men who journey on their lawful callings?”

“Stranger, if you ar' much acquainted in this country,” said the leader of the emigrants, “can you tell a traveller where he may find necessaries for the night?”

“Is the land filled on the other side of the Big River?” demanded the old man, solemnly, and without appearing to hearken to the other's question; “or why do I see a sight, I had never thought to behold again?”

“Why, there is country left, it is true, for such as have money, and ar' not particular in the choice,” returned the emigrant; “but to my taste, it is getting crowdy. What may a

man call the distance, from this place to the nighest point on the main river?”

“A hunted deer could not cool his sides, in the Mississippi, without travelling a weary five hundred miles.”

“And what may you name the district, hereaway?”

“By what name,” returned the old man, pointing significantly upward, “would you call the spot, where you see yonder cloud?”

The emigrant looked at the other, like one who did not comprehend his meaning, and who half suspected he was trifled with, but he contented himself by saying—

“You ar' but a new inhabitant, like myself, I reckon, stranger, otherwise you would not be backward in helping a traveller to some advice; words cost but little, and sometimes lead to friendships.”

“Advice is not a gift, but a debt that the old owe to the young. What would you wish to know?”

“Where I may camp for the night. I'm no great difficulty maker, as to bed and board; but, all old journeyers, like myself, know the virtue of sweet water, and a good browse for the cattle.”

“Come then with me, and you shall be master of both; and little more is it that I can offer on this hungry prairie.”

As the old man was speaking, he raised his heavy rifle to his shoulder, with a facility a little remarkable for his years and appearance, and without further words led the way over the acclivity to the adjacent bottom.

CHAPTER II

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Up with my tent: here will I lie to-night,
But where, to-morrow?—Well, all's one for that
—Richard the Third.

The travellers soon discovered the usual and unerring evidences that the several articles necessary to their situation were not far distant. A clear and gurgling spring burst out of the side of the declivity, and joining its waters to those of other similar little fountains in its vicinity, their united contributions formed a run, which was easily to be traced, for miles along the prairie, by the scattering foliage and verdure which occasionally grew within the influence of its moisture. Hither, then, the stranger held his way, eagerly followed by the willing teams, whose instinct gave them a prescience of refreshment and rest.

On reaching what he deemed a suitable spot, the old man halted, and with an enquiring look, he seemed to demand if it possessed the needed conveniences. The leader of the emigrants cast his eyes, understandingly, about him, and examined the place with the keenness of one competent to judge of so nice a question, though in that dilatory and heavy manner, which rarely permitted him to betray precipitation.

“Ay, this may do,” he said, satisfied with his scrutiny; “boys, you have seen the last of the sun; be stirring.”

The young men manifested a characteristic obedience. The order, for such in tone and manner it was, in truth, was received with respect; but the utmost movement was the

falling of an axe or two from the shoulder to the ground, while their owners continued to regard the place with listless and incurious eyes. In the mean time, the elder traveller, as if familiar with the nature of the impulses by which his children were governed, disencumbered himself of his pack and rifle, and, assisted by the man already mentioned as disposed to appeal so promptly to the rifle, he quietly proceeded to release the cattle from the gears.

At length the eldest of the sons stepped heavily forward, and, without any apparent effort, he buried his axe to the eye, in the soft body of a cotton-wood tree. He stood, a moment, regarding the effect of the blow, with that sort of contempt with which a giant might be supposed to contemplate the puny resistance of a dwarf, and then flourishing the implement above his head, with the grace and dexterity with which a master of the art of offence would wield his nobler though less useful weapon, he quickly severed the trunk of the tree, bringing its tall top crashing to the earth in submission to his prowess. His companions regarded the operation with indolent curiosity, until they saw the prostrate trunk stretched on the ground, when, as if a signal for a general attack had been given, they advanced in a body to the work, and in a space of time, and with a neatness of execution that would have astonished an ignorant spectator, they stripped a small but suitable spot of its burden of forest, as effectually, and almost as promptly, as if a whirlwind had passed along the place.

The stranger had been a silent but attentive observer of their progress. As tree after tree came whistling down, he

cast his eyes upward at the vacancies they left in the heavens, with a melancholy gaze, and finally turned away, muttering to himself with a bitter smile, like one who disdained giving a more audible utterance to his discontent. Pressing through the group of active and busy children, who had already lighted a cheerful fire, the attention of the old man became next fixed on the movements of the leader of the emigrants and of his savage looking assistant.

These two had, already, liberated the cattle, which were eagerly browsing the grateful and nutritious extremities of the fallen trees, and were now employed about the wagon, which has been described as having its contents concealed with so much apparent care. Notwithstanding this particular conveyance appeared to be as silent, and as tenantless as the rest of the vehicles, the men applied their strength to its wheels, and rolled it apart from the others, to a dry and elevated spot, near the edge of the thicket. Here they brought certain poles, which had, seemingly, been long employed in such a service, and fastening their larger ends firmly in the ground, the smaller were attached to the hoops that supported the covering of the wagon. Large folds of cloth were next drawn out of the vehicle, and after being spread around the whole, were pegged to the earth in such a manner as to form a tolerably capacious and an exceedingly convenient tent. After surveying their work with inquisitive, and perhaps jealous eyes, arranging a fold here, and driving a peg more firmly there, the men once more applied their strength to the wagon, pulling it, by its projecting tongue, from the centre of the canopy, until it appeared in the open air, deprived of its covering, and