

THE PRAIRIE-BIRD.

CHAPTER I.

Is which the reader will find a sketch of a village in the West, and will be introduced to some of the dramatic persons.

There is, perhaps, no country in the world more favoured, in respect to natural advantages, than the State of Ohio in North America: the soil is of inexhaustible fertility; the climate temperate; the rivers, flowing into Lake Erie to the north, and through the Ohio into the Mississippi to the south-west, are navigable for many hundreds of miles, the forests abound with the finest timber, and even the bowels of the earth pay, in various kinds of mineral, abundant contribution to the general wealth: the southern frontier of the State is bounded by the noble river from which she derives her name, and which obtained from the early French traders and missionaries the well-deserved appellation of "La Belle Rivière."

Towns and cities are now multiplying upon its banks; the axe has laid low vast tracts of its forests; the plough has passed over many thousand acres of the prairies which it fertilized; and crowds of steamboats, laden with goods, manufactures, and passengers from every part of the world, urge their busy way through its waters.

Far different was the appearance and condition of that region at the period when the events detailed in the following narrative occurred. The reader must bear in mind that, at the close of the last century, the vast tracts of forest and prairie now forming the States of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, were all included in what was then called the North-west Territory: it was still inhabited by numerous bands of Indian tribes, of which the most powerful were the Lenap or Delaware, the Shawanons, the Miamies, and the Wyandots or Hurons.

Here and there, at favourable positions on the navigable rivers, were trading posts, defended by small forts, to which the Indians brought their skins of bear, deer, bison, and beaver; receiving in exchange, powder, rifles, paint, hatchets, knives, blankets, and other articles, which, although unknown to their forefathers, had become to them, through their intercourse with the whites, numbered among the necessities of life. But the above-mentioned animals, especially the last two, were already scarce in this region; and the more enterprising of the hunters, Indians as well as white men, made annual excursions to the wild and boundless hunting-ground, westward of the Mississippi.

At the close of the eighteenth century, the villages and settlements on the north bank of the Ohio, being scarce and far apart, were built, rather for the purpose of trading with the Indians than for agriculture or civilized industry;

and their inhabitants were as bold and hardy, sometimes as wild and lawless, as the red men, with whom they were beginning to dispute the soil.

Numerous quarrels arose between these western settlers and their Indian neighbours; blood was frequently shed, and fierce retaliation ensued, which ended in open hostility. The half-disciplined militia, aided sometimes by regular troops, invaded and burnt the Indian villages; while the red men, seldom able to cope with their enemy in the open field, cut off detached parties, massacred unprotected families, and so swift and indiscriminate was their revenge, that settlements, at some distance from the scene of war, were often aroused at midnight by the unexpected alarm of the war-whoop and the firebrand. There were occasions, however, when the Indians boldly attacked and defeated the troops sent against them; but General Wayne, having taken the command of the western forces (about four years before the commencement of our tale), routed them at the battle of the Miamies with great slaughter; after which many of them went off to the Mississippian plains, and those who remained, no more ventured to appear in the field against the United States.

One of the earliest trading posts established in that region was Marietta, a pretty village situated at the mouth of the Muskingum river, where it falls into the Ohio. Even so far back as the year 1799 it boasted a church, several taverns, a strong block-house, serving as a protection against an attack from the Indians; stores for the sale of grocery; and, in short, such a collection of buildings as has, in more than one instance in the western states of America, grown into a city with unexampled rapidity.

This busy and flourishing village had taken the lead, of all others within a hundred miles, in the construction of vessels for the navigation of the Ohio and Mississippi; nay, some of the more enterprising merchants there settled, had actually built, launched, and freighted brigs and schooners of sufficient burthen to brave the seas in the Mexican gulf; and had opened, in their little inland port, a direct trade with the West Indian islands, to which they exported flour, pork, malze, and other articles, their vessels returning laden with fruit, coffee, sugar, and rum.

The largest store in the village, situated in the centre of a row of houses fronting the river, was built of brick, and divided into several compartments, wherein were to be found all the necessities of life,—all such at least as were called for by the inhabitants of Marietta and its neighbourhood; one of these compartments was crowded with skins and furs from

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