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JOHN JAMES AUDUBON.

"Some years ago," says a writer, "there arrived at the Cataract House, Niagara Falls, an odd-looking man, whose appearance and deportment were quite in contrast with the crowds of well-dressed and polished figures which adorned that celebrated resort. He seemed to have just sprung from the woods; his dress, which was made of leather, stood dreadfully in need of repair, apparently not having felt the touch of a needle for many a long month. A worn-out blanket, that might have served for a bed, was buckled to his shoulders; a large knife hung on one side, balanced by a long rusty tin box on the other, and his beard uncropped, tangled and coarse, fell down upon his bosom, as if to counterpoise the weight of the thick, dark locks that supported themselves on his back and shoulders. This being strange to the spectators, seemingly half civilized, half savage, pushed his steps into the sitting room, unstrapped his little burden, quietly looked around for the landlord, and modestly asked for breakfast. The host at first drew back with evident repugnance to receive this uncouth form among his genteel visitors, but a few words whispered in his ear satisfied him; and the stranger took his place in the company, some shrugging their shoulders, some staring, some laughing outright. Yet there was more in that one man than in the whole company. He had been entertained with distinction at the tables of princes; learned societies, to which the like of Cuvier belonged, had bowed down to welcome his presence; kings had been complimented when he spoke to them; in short, he was one whose fame will be growing brighter when the fashionables who laughed at him, and many much greater than they, shall have been forgotten. From every hill-top and deep, shady grove, the birds, those blossoms of the air, will sing his name. The little wren will pipe it with her matin hymn; the oriole carol it from the slender grasses of the meadows; the turtle-dove roll it through the secret forests; the many-voiced mocking-bird pour it along the air; and the imperial eagle, as he sits far up on the blue mountains, will scream it to the tempest and the stars. He was John J. Audubon, ornithologist."

Audubon was born in Louisiana in 1781, of French Protestant parents, and from his very earliest years exhibited a passion for birds and animals, spending days and weeks at a time in watching their habits and making careful drawings of every specimen he saw. At the age of fifteen, his father, perceiving his talent, sent him to Paris where he spent the next two years,

taking among his other studies lessons in the school of the historical artist, David. Returning then to America, his father settled him on a plantation in Pennsylvania, and he soon afterwards married. But nothing could induce him to give up his natural history. For fifteen years he went every year on long expeditions, traversing the remote wilds of the forests, and would not see his family for months at a time. From his plantation he went to live in the village of Henderson on the banks of the Ohio, where he continued his expeditions and studies, and after some few years more he started for Philadelphia with a portfolio filled with over one thousand delineations of birds, all given in the natural colors. But here a terrible calamity befell him. Finding that his business would take him away from the

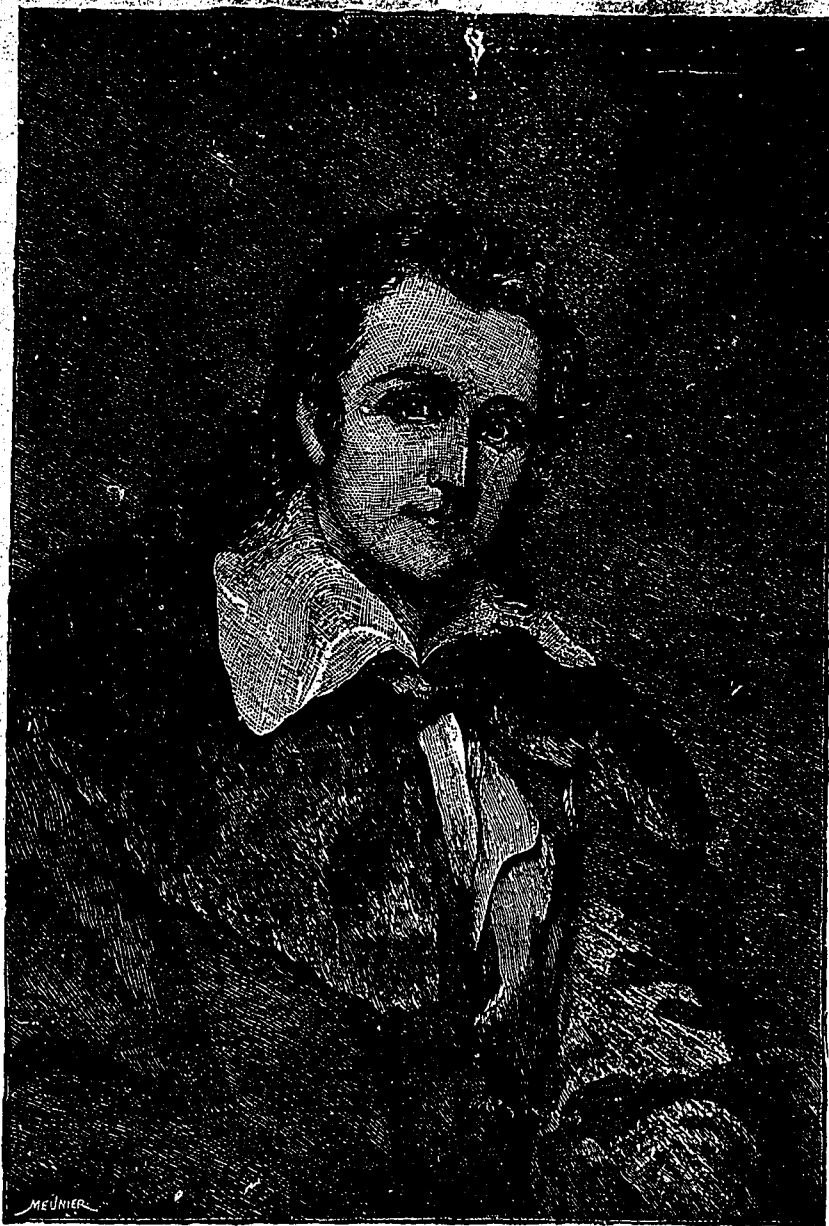
city for some weeks he left his portfolio for safe keeping in the warehouse of a friend. But imagine his horror on his return to find that what had cost him years of severest toil had been in a few days totally destroyed by rats. So terrible was the shock that it threw him into a fever, and for some time he lay at the point of death. But though dismayed he was not utterly cast down and on his recovery he plunged once more into the wilds and at the end of three years returned to his family, who had in the meantime returned to Louisiana, with his portfolio once more filled. After only a short stay there he started for England to exhibit the results of his labors there. In Liverpool, Manchester and Edinburgh he was received with the greatest enthusiasm, and his pro-

ject to publish a work on the birds of America received a cordial support. At first, according to advice, he proposed to issue it in large quarto volumes, as the size that would be of the most practical use to its owners, and for which he would be likely to get the largest number of subscribers. But on further consideration he changed his mind and the work was issued in four immense volumes on the largest elephant folio paper with a whole page devoted to each species, every bird depicted in full size and in its natural colors. The first volume was issued in New York in 1830, the second in 1834, the third three years later and the fourth in 1839. The whole contained four hundred and thirty-five colored plates containing ten hundred and fifty-five figures of birds, all individually known to him and originally painted with his own hand. It was the most magnificent work of the kind ever given to the world and was characterized by the great naturalist Cuvier as the most magnificent monument ever raised by art to nature."

During the years of the publication of this great work he was many times back and forth across the Atlantic, now in Europe discussing his beloved science with the great naturalists there, and again plunged in the depths of the primeval American forest, traversing during that time the country from Labrador to Florida, and from the Atlantic to the Western Prairies. His second work was his American Ornithological Biography, filled with vivid pictures of the habits of the birds and the adventures of the writer.

After 1839 he went on no more solitary expeditions but was always accompanied by his two sons, Victor and John, who inherited much of his talents and zeal and one or two other naturalists. Between 1840 and 1850, he accomplished two more works. "The Quadrupeds of America," and a "Biography of American Quadrupeds," the latter being considered by many superior to his corresponding work on birds.

Personally Audubon was one of the happiest of men, and one of the most interesting of characters. He had a fine vigorous frame, a remarkable head and pleasing, expressive face. While his conversation was always animated and instructive, his manner was most unassuming. His nature was deeply religious and he often expressed his deep thanks to God for his loving family, his dear friends, and his large share of all that contributed to make life agreeable. At sixty-five years of age he possessed all the sprightliness and vigor of a young man, and his death at the age of seventy-one, was so peaceful that it was almost like a gentle falling asleep.



JOHN JAMES AUDUBON.

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