David Crockett: His Life and Adventures

John S. C. Abbot (12345X)

5 March 2007

Foreword

Please find an extract of a classic work by John. S. C. Abbot below. You can read the rest at [1].

1 Parentage and Childhood.

The Emigrant. – Crossing the Alleghanies. – The boundless Wilderness. – The Hut on the Holston. – Life's Necessaries. – The Massacre. – Birth of David Crockett. – Peril of the Boys. – Anecdote. – Removal to Greenville; to Cove Creek. – Increased Emigration. – Loss of the Mill. – The Tavern. – Engagement with the Drover. – Adventures in the Wilderness. – Virtual Captivity. – The Escape. – The Return. – The Runaway. – New Adventures.

A LITTLE more than a hundred years ago, a poor man, by the name of Crockett, embarked on board an emigrant-ship, in Ireland, for the New World. He was in the humblest station in life. But very little is known respecting his uneventful career excepting its tragical close. His family consisted of a wife and three or four children. Just before he sailed, or on the Atlantic passage, a son was born, to whom he gave the name of John. The family probably landed in Philadelphia, and dwelt somewhere in Pennsylvania, for a year or two, in one of those slab shanties, with which all are familiar as the abodes of the poorest class of Irish emigrants.

After a year or two, Crockett, with his little family, crossed the almost pathless Alleghanies. Father, mother, and children trudged along through the rugged defiles and over the rocky cliffs, on foot. Probably a single pack-horse conveyed their few household goods. The hatchet and the rifle were the only means of obtaining food, shelter, and even clothing. With the hatchet, in an hour or two, a comfortable camp could be constructed, which would protect them from wind and rain. The camp-fire, cheering the darkness of

the night, drying their often wet garments, and warming their chilled limbs with its genial glow, enabled them to enjoy that almost greatest of earthly luxuries, peaceful sleep.

The rifle supplied them with food. The fattest of turkeys and the most tender steaks of venison, roasted upon forked sticks, which they held in their hands over the coals, feasted their voracious appetites. This, to them, was almost sumptuous food. The skin of the deer, by a rapid and simple process of tanning, supplied them with moccasons, and afforded material for the repair of their tattered garments.

We can scarcely comprehend the motive which led this solitary family to push on, league after league, farther and farther from civilization, through the trackless forests. At length they reached the Holston River. This stream takes its rise among the western ravines of the Alleghanies, in Southwestern Virginia. Flowing hundreds of miles through one of the most solitary and romantic regions upon the globe, it finally unites with the Clinch River, thus forming the majestic Tennessee.

One hundred years ago, this whole region, west of the Alleghanies, was an unexplored and an unknown wilderness. Its silent rivers, its forests, and its prairies were crowded with game. Countless Indian tribes, whose names even had never been heard east of the Alleghanies, ranged this vast expanse, pursuing, in the chase, wild beasts scarcely more savage than themselves.

The origin of these Indian tribes and their past history are lost in oblivion. Centuries have come and gone, during which joys and griefs, of which we now can know nothing, visited their humble lodges. Providence seems to have raised up a peculiar class of men, among the descendants of the emigrants from the Old World, who, weary of the restraints of civilization, were ever ready to plunge into the wildest depths of the wilderness, and to rear their lonely huts in the midst of all its perils, privations, and hardships.

This solitary family of the Crocketts followed down the northwestern banks of the Hawkins River for many a weary mile, until they came to a spot which struck their fancy as a suitable place to build their Cabin. In subsequent years a small village called Rogersville was gradually reared upon this spot, and the territory immediately around was organized into what is now known as Hawkins County. But then, for leagues in every direction, the solemn forest stood in all its grandeur. Here Mr. Crockett, alone and unaided save by his wife and children, constructed a little shanty, which could have been but little more than a hunter's camp. He could not lift solid logs to build a substantial house. The hard-trodden ground was the only floor of the single room which he enclosed. It was roofed with bark of trees piled heavily on, which afforded quite effectual protection from the rain. A hole cut through the slender logs was the only window. A fire was built in one

corner, and the smoke eddied through a hole left in the roof. The skins of bears, buffaloes, and wolves provided couches, all sufficient for weary ones, who needed no artificial opiate to promote sleep. Such, in general, were the primitive homes of many of those bold emigrants who abandoned the comforts of civilized life for the solitudes of the wilderness.

They did not want for most of what are called the necessaries of life. The river and the forest furnished a great variety of fish and game. Their hut, humble as it was, effectually protected them from the deluging tempest and the inclement cold. The climate was genial in a very high degree, and the soil, in its wonderful fertility, abundantly supplied them with corn and other simple vegetables. But the silence and solitude which reigned are represented, by those who experienced them, as at times something dreadful.

One principal motive which led these people to cross the mountains, was the prospect of an ultimate fortune in the rise of land. Every man who built a cabin and raised a crop of grain, however small, was entitled to four hundred acres of land, and a preemption right to one thousand more adjoining, to be secured by a land-office warrant.

In this lonely home, Mr. Crockett, with his wife and children, dwelt for some months, perhaps years – we know not how long. One night, the awful yell of the savage was heard, and a band of human demons came rushing upon the defenceless family. Imagination cannot paint the tragedy which ensued. Though this lost world, ever since the fall of Adam, has been filled to repletion with these scenes of woe, it causes one's blood to curdle in his veins as he contemplates this one deed of cruelty and blood.

The howling fiends were expeditious in their work. The father and mother were pierced by arrows, mangled with the tomahawk, and scalped. One son, severely wounded, escaped into the forest. Another little boy, who was deaf and dumb, was taken captive and carried by the Indians to their distant tribe, where he remained, adopted into the tribe, for about eighteen years. He was then discovered by some of his relatives, and was purchased back at a considerable ransom. The torch was applied to the cabin, and the bodies of the dead were consumed in the crackling flames.

What became of the remainder of the children, if there were any others present in this midnight scene of conflagration and blood, we know not. There was no reporter to give us the details. We simply know that in some way John Crockett, who subsequently became the father of that David whose history we now write, was not involved in the general massacre. It is probable that he was not then with the family, but that he was a hired boy of all work in some farmer's family in Pennsylvania.

. . .

References

[1] John S. C. Abbot (1874) *David Crockett: His Life and Adventures.* Available from Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, at `http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/AbbCroc.html`