The Whitewater Valley

Ed Lewis

The main fork of the Whitewater River has its origin in the rugged hills near Laurel, Indiana. This swirling, torrid, foam-flecked stream comes pouring down out of these hills into the lowlands which form its broad basin near Metamora. When it leaves this peaceful Hoosier hamlet the stream threads its way through a series of graceful spirals until it reaches the historic little city of Brookville where it is joined by its little sister, the east fork. The path of the river, from Brookville to the spot where it empties into the Miami River near Miamitown, Ohio, leads it through some of the most beautiful scenery to be found in Indiana today; but seen through the eyes of the early pioneers, it produced a panoramic scene of even greater splendor.

Early settlers pushing inland up the Whitewater, clad in its garments of spring, were amazed by the colorful glory of this ribbon of white water with its backdrop of green hills. A pioneer standing on one of these hills near Brookville on a typical spring day was blessed with a vision of indescribable loveliness. At his feet he saw thick stands of virgin timber striding majestically down to the edge of the flood plain. Here on the plain grew the water-loving species of plants — gnarled willows and roughbacked cottonwoods, mingling in a democratic spirit, with the gigantic, silvery trunks of the stern and noble poplars.

Under these heavy trees rose the dense green blanket of the underbrush. Here the smaller plants, whose seed had been sown by angry flood waters, vied with each other in a struggle for soil and sunlight. It was a struggle made more difficult by the thick mass of curling vines, spreading and creeping over the basin — seeking plants on which to climb. This carpet of snarled vegetation crawls down to the very edge of the peaceful stream which gurgles contentedly against the bosom of its rocky banks. The watcher sees a streak of light flash briefly and then fade again into the now dimpled waters as a bass, darting up from the shadowy caverns below, strikes down some hapless insect. There is a faint splash from the far bank and the sleek black head of a mink splits the crystal clearness of the surface where he swims across. The water flows back in a V-shaped wedge as he drives his slender, agile body with powerful strokes. Reaching the bank, he climbs gracefully out, shakes himself to dry his dark, rich fur and vanishes into the undergrowth.

An azure sky decorated with scattered puffs of white clouds, drifting aimlessly before a smoke-free breeze, forms a canopy over his head. A hawk, his sharp eyes riveted downward, floats effortlessly above the clouds on tireless wings while he searches for prey. His hooked talons curl against the soft red feathers of his breast as he keeps his lonely vigil. His shadow, sweeping ominously over the little denizens of the forest, strikes terror to their hearts and they crouch trembling until it passes.

The wide-eyed pioneer envisions the day when he can claim this vast untamed land as his own, for to him who has tried in vain to eke an existence from the barren rock-strewn hills of New England, it...
seems a very garden in the wilderness. The vast tracts of fertile soil contrast vividly with the brushy untillable slopes of the Alleghenies through which he has passed on his sojourn into the unknown. He has crossed half a continent to find a land to his liking, and now it is spread out before him in all the luxurious splendor of its spring colors.

This peaceful, sylvan scene strikes a responsive chord in his heart. He realizes that here he has found the Promised Land — free from the oppressing hand of the tyrant. Here is a mecca for all the travel-worn settlers who are trudging their weary, westward way. Here he can build a home to shelter his loved ones; he can rear a family whose roots will be so firmly entrenched in the soil of this quiet, secluded valley, that generations of his offspring will till the soil of the very land he now gazes on and grow old with the passing seasons; the ageless, majestic hills and the graceful, sweeping curves of the beautiful, unsullied stream will impart a sense of serenity and security to their souls, letting them live peaceful and productive lives in a land of their own making.

Already the prophetic gaze of the hardy pioneer can see the lush bottomlands divided into fields where the green corn waves its proud tassels and the golden wheat ripples gently in the August breezes. His mind’s eye pictures herds of sleek, contented, whitefaced cattle grazing fetlock deep in the fields of beautiful blue-grass.

Yes, the long quest is at an end. Here, sprawling before him, is a land which any man can be proud to call his home.

SAMPLING . . . .

The hours were passing smoothly with the homing ship, and in that calm spring evening, the sea scarcely stirred. The pale sun dipped and sent a silver path shimmering along the blue water. Ever so slowly the sun sank at the end of its path, spreading its colors to the heavens. The fading rays were gradually blotted out, but in those waters where the horizons were empty, one felt the presence of home.

Home

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