

**ALTOWAN; OR, INCIDENTS
OF LIFE AND ADVENTURE IN
THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS.
IN TWO VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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Altowan; Or, Incidents of Life and Adventure in the Rocky Mountains. In Two Volumes. Vol. I
by Sir William Drummond Stewart & J. Watson Webb

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SIR WILLIAM DRUMMOND STEWART & J. WATSON WEBB

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A L T O W A N;

OR,

INCIDENTS OF LIFE AND ADVENTURE

IN

THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS.

BY

AN AMATEUR TRAVELER.

See Wm. Drummond Stewart, *N. Y. T.*, 1795-1833.

EDITED BY

June 4,
J. WATSON WEBB.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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May 1942

NOTICE TO THE READER. .

THE following story has been written for the amusement of some young friends on Long Island. The sketches of Indian habits and the incidents of the chase which it contains, are taken from life, and the description of the regions where the scene is laid, in the western wilds, is drawn from Nature.

It has been written during voyages over heaving seas and in moments of idleness in various parts of the world; and, just as it is, without even a revision, I offer it to those for whom it was intended. Should it ever go beyond their fireside and be read by others, though I may bespeak their indulgence, I can owe them no apology.

TO

CHARLES FENNO HOFFMAN, Esq.

MY DEAR SIR,

YOUR knowledge and love of woodcraft, and your ability to appreciate a correct picture of the North American Indian—sketched from life by the pencil of a master—prompt this dedication of a work, which will be found, on perusal, one of the very few which exhibits the native of our forests as he was, and still is, where he roams uncontaminated by his intercourse with civilized man, the boundless regions of the Northwest.

There is no one subject upon which such universal ignorance prevails, as in regard to the habits, customs, and character of the North American Indian; and yet almost all Americans imagine, that on this question at least, they are well-informed.* This is very natural; and

* Among the deluded mass, our countryman COOPER stands conspicuous. In common with all of us, he listened in infancy

doubtless, I would have been equally misled by the nursery tales of our country, if it had not been my lot to pass nearly nine years of my life in the army; and most of that period, as you well know, upon our then northwestern frontier

to the nursery tales which had been handed down from generation to generation, with such additions as the love of the marvelous among nursery maids, very naturally prompted; and as Mr. COORSA is not accustomed to doubt the accuracy of his knowledge on any subject, it should not be matter of surprise with those who know him, that he assumes perfectly to understand the Indian character. In consequence of this assumption of knowledge—based solely upon the sources to which I have referred—he has written a series of exceedingly clever books, the chief tendency of which is to perpetuate his own crude conceptions of Indian character, by embodying all the nursery gossip of two centuries, and handing it down to posterity as a picture drawn from life, instead of what it really is—the tradition of the ignorant, embellished by the lovers of the marvelous, to frighten into silence, if not sleep, the restless inmates of the nursery.

I do not make these remarks in any spirit of unkindness to Mr. COORSA, but in the way of protest against his delineation of Indian character; nor do I flatter myself that I can by such protest, prevent, through all time, his caricatures of the North American Indian, being measurably received as faithful portraits of a race rapidly passing away before the resistless march of civilization. Mr. COORSA has justly won for himself, by his works of fiction, a place in the literary history of his country; and although posterity can not fail to note his literary deficiencies and want of familiarity with the beauties of his native language; and although they may possibly learn that he was a man of violent passions, self-willed, and egotistical to an extent which prompted him, in an evil hour, and for an imaginary slight, to misrepresent and hold up to the ridicule of Europe, the manners, habits, and tastes of his

—at Green Bay, Chicago, the Upper Mississippi, and Missouri—at a period when the white man was only known to the native of the forest through the army, and the Indian trader and *voyageur*, who annually passed into their coun-

countrymen—they must ever concede to him talents of a high order, however deficient he may be in genius and literary acquirements. His plain, practical, common-sense view of all subjects which do not involve his personal feelings and prejudices, can not fail to secure him a high rank among his contemporaries; and at the expiration of half a century—when it will matter little whether his picture of American society in 1836, was or was not a ridiculous caricature, prompted by mortified vanity—the only portions of his works which I should desire to see expunged, are his very graphic, but fanciful conceptions of Indian character, and his misrepresentations—I can not use a milder term—of the battle of Lake Erie in the war of 1812.

The biographers of PERRY and the historians of the late war, have already very thoroughly exposed the gross injustice done to PERRY and the nation in COOPER'S account of that naval engagement; while the incidental remarks of this introduction to an authentic work on Indian life, will at least caution the general reader against his delineations of Indian character.

When in 1819, I entered the army, I too, in common with most persons in the Atlantic States, believed in the nursery picture of Indian life which had become traditionary in all our homes; and had I not become a wanderer in the Western wilds, and a sojourner in the wigwags of its people, I should doubtless, have been one of the most confiding believers in Mr. COOPER'S portrait of the aborigine—based, as it unquestionably is, upon his profound knowledge of their character, acquired in connection with the veritable history of "Mother Goose," and the no less interesting adventures of "Jack the Giant-killer."

try, but confined themselves to its principal water-courses.

After reporting for duty—a boy of seventeen—sixty days of military duty in this harbor, were quite sufficient to give me a surfeit of city garrison life, and to revive in me the earliest promptings of my boyhood,—a desire to visit the unknown regions of the great West; to hunt and shoot where the Indian alone had disturbed the game; to angle in streams where the line of the white man and the disciples of the wily WALTON, had never tempted their finny inhabitants; and to roam with the aboriginal savage his native forests; to see him in his native grandeur, and to know him as he was and is, when uncontaminated by contact with that civilization of which he is certain to imbibe all that is vicious, while it fails to impart to him, in return, any of its blessings.

An opportunity soon offered to indulge this early bent of my nature. The autumn of 1819 found me on duty at Detroit, and the following spring, in command of a separate post on Lake Huron. Thenceforward my progress was westward; and during a long period I reveled in those scenes which imagination had ever portrayed as full of excitement and adventure; and

the actual charms of which, exceeded even the imaginings of a somewhat ardent temperament.

But it is no part of my intention to write a history of my own adventures in the Far West; and this allusion to them, is simply to remind you that I should be qualified, by experience at least, to judge of any delineation of Indian character which may come under my observation.

Having said this much of myself, permit me to give you a history of "*Attowan*," and apprise you how it happens that I am its editor.

In the summer of 1832, a British half-pay officer visited this city, and we were accidentally thrown much in each other's society. A similarity of tastes and pursuits, soon produced an intimacy, gradually ripening into a friendship, which I trust, is destined to continue through life. He was one of the gallant fellows who fought under Wellington at Waterloo, and bore upon his person honorable marks of his gallantry upon that occasion, and among his insignia, the evidence of his country's gratitude. The second son of one of the most ancient families in Great Britain, with the blood of princes in his veins, and connected by birth and intermarriages with royalty itself, he had retired upon half pay; and in the spirit of adventure, which forms a prom-