JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

THE PIONEERS

Introduction by John Robert Colombo

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

The Pioneers

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Introduction

The Pioneers, or The Sources of the Susquehanna was immediately popular when it was published in 1823, and even today this novel of pioneer life has lost little of its appeal. Its author, James Fenimore Cooper, has been called "the earliest important American novelist." *The Pioneers,* Cooper's first major book, has been described as "the first true romance of the frontier in American literature." Actually its endless attractiveness lies elsewhere, in the period of American history Cooper decided to describe: the westward movement of the pioneers into Indian territory.

The Pioneers recreates a frontier and describes a hero. The frontier is, surprisingly, Upper State New York, the region around Otsego Lake. It is ten years after the Revolutionary War, and the frontier of white settlement is gradually advancing across the American continent to the Pacific, carrying with it pioneers, hunt-

ers, and trappers. One pioneer, a little ahead of the rest, is Cooper's hero Natty Bumppo, who cannot feel at home in settled society. Natty, or Nathaniel, is nicknamed Leatherstocking, and he appears in other Cooper novels as Hawkeye, Long Rifle, and Deerslayer.

Although complete in itself, *The Pioneers* is the first in a series of five novels, all equally thrilling, with the collective title "The Leatherstocking Tales." For the reader who wants to follow this epic story of the white woodsman in its proper sequence, the saga starts with *The Deerslayer,* in which Natty is young and a bit foolish. In *The Last of the Mohicans,* Cooper's masterpiece, Natty is older and already a past master of hairbreadth escapes. Natty is at his prime in *The Pathfinder,* with its many magnificent forest and sea settings. In the present novel, *The Pioneers,* Natty is aging, and the last lines find him "the foremost in that band of pioneers who are opening the way for the march of the nation across the continent." Natty finally meets his death on the distant plains of the last novel of the series, *The Prairie.*

The novelist D. H. Lawrence liked *The Pioneers* because it presented "some of the loveliest, most glamorous pictures in all literature." These scenes were details Cooper remembered from his youth. Although born in Burlington, New Jersey, in 1789, he was reared in the wild country around the setting of this story, Otsego Lake, New York, where his father was a rich, land-owning Congressman. The future author was educated at Yale until, at fourteen, he was expelled for committing a prank. He joined the U.S. Navy for three years, but resigned his commission in 1811 to marry

and become a gentleman farmer managing three farms.

Cooper's first two novels were written for fun, but were poorly received. His third was *The Pioneers*, and it met with such success that Cooper turned it into the first of "The Leatherstocking Tales." In 1826, Cooper became a U.S. consul at Lyons, France, and he lived and wrote about American Indians from the Continent until 1833, when he returned to New York. Cooper wrote dozens of popular novels about high seas, deep forests, and politics before his death in 1851 at Cooperstown, New York, a town his father had founded many years before.

During his life, Cooper was probably the most widely read American writer of all time. He imitated the romantic novels of Sir Walter Scott and, like Scott, he felt his novels should both entertain and elevate. Consequently, Cooper's descriptions of nature are ennobling, and his narrative always sees the triumph of virtue over vice, bravery over cruelty. Natty Bumppo shows this, too. The character of Natty was based on an old trapper the author met while a child, and on Daniel Boone, whose death at the time revived popular interest in the disappearing woodsmen of the wild West. To these rugged models, Cooper added nobility of character. He turned Natty from a woodsman into a natural gentleman, an individualist, not only a resourceful pioneer but a brave lover of freedom, a founding father of the West.

JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO

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THE PIONEERS

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

As this work professes, in its title-page, to be a descriptive tale, they who will take the trouble to read it may be glad to know how much of its contents is literal fact, and how much is intended to represent a general picture. The author is very sensible that, had he confined himself to the latter, always the most effective, as it is the most valuable mode of conveying knowledge of this nature, he would have made a far better book. But in commencing to describe scenes, and perhaps he may add characters, that were so familiar to his own youth, there was a constant temptation to delineate that which he had known, rather than that which he might have imagined. This rigid adhesion to truth, an indispensable requisite in history and travels, destroys the charm of fiction; for all that is necessary to be conveyed to the mind by the latter had better be done by delineations of principles, and of characters in their classes, than by a too fastidious attention to originals.

New York having but one county of Otsego, and the Susquehanna but one proper source, there can be no mistake as to the site of the tale. The history of this district of country, so far as it is connected with civilized men, is soon told.

Otsego, in common with most of the interior of the province of New York, was included in the county of Albany, previously to the war of the separation. It then became, in a subsequent division of territory, a part of Montgomery; and, finally, having obtained a sufficient population of its own, it was set apart as a county by itself, shortly after the peace of 1783. It lies among those low spurs of the Alleghanies which cover the midland counties of New York; and it is a little east of a meridional line drawn through the center of the State. As the waters of New York either flow southerly into the Atlantic or northerly into Ontario and its outlet, Otsego Lake, being the source of the Susquehanna, is, of necessity, among its highest lands. The face of the country, the climate as it was found by the whites, and the manners of the settlers, are described with a minuteness for which the author has no other apology than the force of his own recollections.

Otsego is said to be a word compounded of Ot, a place of meeting, and Sego, or Sago, the ordinary term of salutation used by the Indians of this region. There is a tradition which says that the neighboring tribes were accustomed to meet on the banks of the lake to make their treaties, and otherwise to strengthen their alliances, and which refers the name to this

practice. As the Indian agent of New York had a log dwelling at the foot of the lake, however, it is not impossible that the appellation grew out of the meetings that were held at his council fires; the war drove off the agent, in common with the other officers of the crown; and his rude dwelling was soon abandoned. The author remembers it a few years later, reduced to the humble office of a smoke-house.

In 1779, an expedition was sent against the hostile Indians, who dwelt about a hundred miles west of Otsego, on the banks of the Cayuga. The whole country was then a wilderness, and it was necessary to transport the baggage of the troops by means of the rivers, a devious but practicable route One brigade ascended the Mohawk, until it reached the point nearest to the sources of the Susquehanna, whence it cut a lane through the forest to the head of the Otsego. The boats and baggage were carried over this "portage," and the troops proceeded to the other extremity of the lake, where they disembarked and encamped. The Susquehanna, a narrow though rapid stream at its source, was much filled with "flood wood," or fallen trees; and the troops adopted a novel expedient to facilitate their passage. The Otsego is about nine miles in length, varying in breadth from half a mile to a mile and a half. The water is of great depth, limpid, and supplied from a thousand springs At its foot, the banks are rather less than thirty feet high; the remainder of its margin being in mountains, intervals, and points. The outlet, or the Susquehanna, flows through a gorge in the low banks just mentioned, which may have a width of two hundred feet This gorge was dammed, and the waters of the lake collected· the Susquehanna was converted into a rill When all was ready, the troops embarked, the dam was knocked away, the Otsego poured out its torrent, and the boats went merrily down with the current.

General James Clinton, the brother of George Clinton, then Governor of New York, and the father of De Witt Clinton, who died governor of the same State in 1827, commanded the brigade employed on this duty During the stay of the troops at the foot of the Otsego a soldier was shot for desertion. The grave of this unfortunate man was the first place of human interment that the author ever beheld, as the smoke-house was the first ruin. The swivel alluded to in this work was buried and abandoned by the troops on this occasion; and it was subsequently found in digging the cellars of the author's paternal residence,

Soon after the close of the war, Washington, accompanied by many distinguished men, visited the scene of this tale, it is said, with a view to examine the facilities for opening a communication by water with other points of the country. He stayed but a few hours.

In 1785, the author's father, who had an interest in extensive tracts of land in this wilderness, arrived with a party of surveyors. The manner in which the scene met his eye is described by Judge Temple. At the commencement of the following year

the settlement began; and from that time to this the country has continued to flourish. It is a singular feature in American life, that, at the beginning of this century, when the proprietor of the estate had occasion for settlers on a new settlement, and in a remote county he was enabled to draw them from among the increase of the former colony.

Although the settlement of this part of Otsego a little preceded the birth of the author, it was not sufficiently advanced to render it desirable that an event, so important to himself, should take place in the wilderness. Perhaps his mother had a reasonable distrust of the practise of Dr. Todd, who must then have been in the novitiate of his experimental acquirements. Be that as it may, the author was brought an infant into this valley, and all his first impressions were here obtained. He has inhabited it ever since, at intervals; and he thinks he can answer for the faithfulness of the picture he has drawn.

Otsego has now become one of the most populous districts of New York. It sends forth its emigrants like any other old region; and it is pregnant with industry and enterprise. Its manufactures are prosperous; and it is worthy of remark, that one of the most ingenious machines known in European art is derived from the keen ingenuity which is exercised in this remote region.

In order to prevent mistake, it may be well to say that the incidents of this tale are purely a fiction. The literal facts are chiefly connected with the natural and artificial objects, and the customs of inhabitants. Thus the academy, and courthouse, and jail, and inn, and most similar things, are tolerably exact. They have all, long since, given place to other buildings of a more pretending character. There is also some liberty taken with the truth in the description of the principal dwelling: the real building had no "firstly" and "lastly." It was of bricks, and not of stone; and its roof exhibited none of the peculair beauties of the "composite order." It was erected in an age too primitive for that ambitious school of architecture. But the author indulged his recollection freely when he had fairly entered the door. Here all is literal, even to the severed arm of Wolfe, and the urn which held the ashes of Queen Dido.[1]

The author has elsewhere said that the character of Leather-Stocking is a creation, rendered probable by such auxiliaries as were necessary to produce that effect. Had he drawn still more upon fancy, the lovers of fiction would not have so much cause for their objections to his work. Still the picture would not have been in the least true, without some substitutes for most of the

[1] Though forests still crown the mountains of Otsego, the bear, the wolf, and the panther are nearly strangers to them. Even the innocent deer is rarely seen bounding beneath their arches; for the rifle, and the activity of the settlers, have driven them to other haunts. To this change (which in some particulars, is melancholy to one who knew the country in its infancy) it may be added, that the Otsego is beginning to be a niggard of its treasures.

other personages. The great proprietor resident on his lands, and giving his name to, instead of receiving it from his estates, as in Europe, is common over the whole of New York. The physician, with his theory, rather obtained than corrected by experiments on the human constitution; the pious, self-denying, laborious, and ill-paid missionary; the half-educated, litigious, envious, and disreputable lawyer, with his counterpoise, a brother of the profession, of better origin and of better character; the shiftless, bargaining, discontented seller of his "betterments"; the plausible carpenter, and most of the others, are more familiar to all who have ever dwelt in a new country.

It may be well to say here, a little more explicitly, that there was no intention to describe with particular accuracy any real characters in this book It has often been said, and in published statements, that the heroine of this book was drawn after a sister of the writer, who was killed by a fall from a horse now near half a century since So ingenious is conjecture, that a personal resemblance has been discovered between the fictitious character and the deceased relative! It is scarcely possible to describe two females of the same class in life, who would be less alike, personally, than Elizabeth Temple and the sister of the author who met with the deplorable fate mentioned. In a word, they were as unlike in this respect, as in history, character, and fortunes.

Circumstances rendered this sister singularly dear to the author After a lapse of half a century, he is writing this paragraph with a pain that would induce him to cancel it, were it not still more painful to have it believed that one whom he regarded with a reverence that surpassed the love of a brother, was converted by him into the heroine of a work of fiction.

From circumstances which, after this Introduction, will be obvious to all, the author has had more pleasure in writing "The Pioneers" than the book will, probably, ever give any of its readers He is quite aware of its numerous faults, some of which he has endeavored to repair in this edition; but as he has—in intention, at least—done his full share in amusing the world, he trusts to its good nature for overlooking this attempt to please himself.

CHAPTER 1

"See, Winter comes, to rule the varied year,
Sullen and sad, with all his rising train;
Vapors, and clouds, and storms."

—THOMSON

NEAR the center of the State of New York lies an extensive district of country, whose surface is a succession of hills and dales, or, to speak with greater deference to geographical definitions, of mountains and valleys. It is among these hills that the Delaware takes its rise; and flowing from the limpid lakes and thousand springs of this region, the numerous sources of the Susquehanna meander through the valleys, until uniting their streams, they form one of the proudest rivers of the United States. The mountains are generally arable to the tops, although instances are not wanting where the sides are jutted with rocks, that aid greatly in giving to the country that romantic and picturesque character which it so eminently possesses. The vales are narrow, rich, and cultivated; with a stream uniformly winding through each. Beautiful and thriving villages are found interspersed along the margins of the small lakes, or situated at those points of the streams which are favorable to manufacturing; and neat and comfortable farms, with every indication of wealth about them, are scattered profusely through the vales, and even to the mountain tops. Roads diverge in every direction, from the even and graceful bottoms of the valleys, to the most rugged and intricate passes of the hills. Academies, and minor edifices of learning, meet the eye of the stranger at every few miles, as he winds his way through this uneven territory; and places for the worship of God abound with that frequency which characterizes a moral and reflecting people, and with that variety of exterior and canonical government which flows from unfettered liberty of conscience. In short, the whole district is hourly exhibiting how much can be done, in even a rugged country, and with a severe climate, under the dominion of mild laws, and where every man feels a direct interest in the prosperity of a commonwealth, of which he knows himself to form a part. The expedients of the pioneers who first broke ground in the settlement of this country are succeeded by the permanent improvements of the yeoman, who intends to leave his remains to moulder under the sod which he tills, or perhaps, of the son, who, born in the land, piously

wishes to linger around the grave of his father. Only forty years[1] have passed since this territory was a wilderness.

Very soon after the establishment of the independence of the States, by the peace of 1783, the enterprise of their citizens was directed to a development of the natural advantages of their widely extended dominions Before the war of the Revolution the inhabited parts of the colony of New York were limited to less than a tenth of its possessions A narrow belt of country, extending for a short distance on either side of the Hudson, with a similar occupation of fifty miles on the Mohawk, together with the islands of Nassau and Staten, and a few insulated settlements on chosen land along the margins of streams, composed the country, which was then inhabited by less than two hundred thousand souls Within the short period we have mentioned, the population has spread itself over five degrees of latitude and seven of longitude, and has swelled to a million and a half of inhabitants,[2] who are maintained in abundance, and can look forward to ages before the evil day must arrive, when their possessions shall become unequal to their wants.

Our tale begins in 1793, about seven years after the commencement of one of the earliest of those settlements, which have conduced to effect that magical change in the power and condition of the State, to which we have alluded.

It was near the setting of the sun, on a clear, cold day in December, when a sleigh was moving slowly up one of the mountains, in the district we have described. The day had been fine for the season, and but two or three large clouds, whose color seemed brightened by the light reflected from the mass of snow that covered the earth, floated in a sky of the purest blue. The road wound along the brow of a precipice, and on one side was upheld by a foundation of logs, piled one upon the other, while a narrow excavation in the mountain, in the opposite direction, had made a passage of sufficient width for the ordinary travelling of that day But logs, excavation, and everything that did not reach several feet above the earth, lay alike buried beneath the snow. A single track, barely wide enough to receive the sleigh,[3] denoted the route of the highway, and this was sunk

[1] The book was written in 1823.

[2] The population of New York is now (1831) quite 2,000,000.

[3] Sleigh is the word used in every part of the United States to denote a traineau It is of local use in the west of England, whence it is most probably derived by the Americans. The latter draw a distinction between a sled, or sledge and a sleigh; the sleigh being shod with metal Sleighs are also subdivided into two-horse and one-horse sleighs. Of the latter there are the cutter, with thills so arranged as to permit the horse to travel in the side track, the "pung," or "tow-pung," which is driven with a pole, and the "jumper," a rude construction used for temporary purposes, in the new countries

Many of the American sleighs are elegant, though the use of this mode of conveyance is much lessened with the melioration of the climate, consequent on the clearing of the forests.

nearly two feet below the surrounding surface. In the vale, which lay at a distance of several hundred feet lower, there was what in the language of the country was called a clearing, and all the usual improvements of a new settlement; these even extended up the hill to the point where the road turned short and ran across the level land, which lay on the summit of the mountain; but the summit itself remained in forest. There was a glittering in the atmosphere, as if it were filled with innumerable shining particles; and the noble bay horses that drew the sleigh were covered, in many parts with a white hoar-frost. The vapor from their nostrils was seen to issue like smoke; and every object in the view, as well as every arrangement of the travellers, denoted the depth of winter in the mountains. The harness, which was of a deep, dull black, differing from the glossy varnishing of the present day, was ornamented with enormous plates and buckles of brass, that shone like gold in those transient beams of the sun which found their way obliquely through the tops of the trees. Huge saddles, studded with nails, and fitted with cloth that served as blankets to the shoulders of the cattle, supported four high, square-topped turrets, through which the stout reins led from the mouths of the horses to the hands of the driver, who was a negro, of apparently twenty years of age. His face, which nature had colored with a glistening black, was now mottled with the cold, and his large shining eyes filled with tears; a tribute to its power, that the keen frost of those regions always extracted from one of his African origin. Still there was a smiling expression of good humor in his happy countenance, that was created by the thoughts of home, and a Christmas fireside, with its Christmas frolics. The sleigh was one of those large, comfortable old-fashioned conveyances, which would admit a whole family within its bosom, but which now contained only two passengers besides the driver. The color of its outside was a modest green, and that of its inside a fiery red. The latter was intended to convey the idea of heat in that cold climate. Large buffalo skins, trimmed around the edges with red cloth, cut into festoons, covered the back of the sleigh, and were spread over its bottom, and drawn up around the feet of the travellers—one of whom was a man of middle age, and the other a female, just entering upon womanhood. The former was of a large stature; but the precautions he had taken to guard against the cold left but little of his person exposed to view. A great-coat, that was abundantly ornamented by a profusion of furs, enveloped the whole of his figure, excepting the head, which was covered with a cap of marten skins, lined with morocco, the sides of which were made to fall, if necessary, and were now drawn close over the ears, and fastened beneath his chin with a black ribbon. The top of the cap was surmounted with the tail of the animal whose skin had furnished the rest of the materials, which fell back not ungracefully a few inches behind the head. From beneath this mask were to be seen part of a fine, manly face, and particularly a pair of

expressive, large blue eyes, that promised extraordinary intellect, covert humor, and great benevolence The form of his companion was literally hid beneath the garments she wore. There were furs and silks peeping from under a large camlet cloak, with a thick flannel lining, that, by its cut and size, was evidently intended for a masculine wearer. A huge hood of black silk, that was quilted with down, concealed the whole of her head, except at a small opening in front for breath, through which occasionally sparkled a pair of animated, jet-black eyes.

Both the father and daughter (for such was the connection between the two travellers) were too much occupied with their reflections to break a stillness, that received little or no interruption from the easy gliding of the sleigh, by the sound of their voices. The former was thinking of the wife that had held this their only child to her bosom, when, four years before, she had reluctantly consented to relinquish the society of her daughter, in order that the latter might enjoy the advantages of an education, which the city of New York could only offer at that period. A few months afterwards death had deprived him of the remaining companion of his solitude, but still he had enough of real regard for his child, not to bring her into the comparative wilderness in which he dwelt, until the full period had expired, to which he had limited her juvenile labors. The reflections of the daughter were less melancholy, and mingled with a pleased astonishment at the novel scenery she met at every turn in the road.

The mountain on which they were journeying was covered with pines, that rose without a branch some seventy or eighty feet, and which frequently doubled that height, by the addition of the tops. Through the innumerable vistas that opened beneath the lofty trees, the eye could penetrate, until it was met by a distant inequality in the ground, or was stopped by a view of the summit of the mountain, which lay on the opposite side of the valley to which they were hastening The dark trunks of the trees rose from the pure white of the snow, in regularly formed shafts, until, at a great height, their branches shot forth horizontal limbs, that were covered with a meagre foliage of an evergreen, affording a melancholy contrast to the torpor of nature below. To the travellers, there seemed to be no wind; but these pines waved majestically at their topmost boughs, sending forth a dull, plaintive sound, that was quite in consonance with the rest of the melancholy scene.

The sleigh had glided for some distance along the even surface, and the gaze of the female was bent in inquisitive, and, perhaps, timid glances, into the recesses of the forest, when a loud and continued howling was heard, pealing under the long arches of the woods, like the cry of a numerous pack of hounds. The instant the sound reached the ears of the gentleman, he cried aloud to the black:

"Hold up, Aggy; there is old Hector; I should know his bay among ten thousand! The Leather-Stocking has put his hounds