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THE BIG SANDY VALLEY

BY

WILLIAM ELY

CATLETTSBURG, KY. 1887

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## PREFACE.

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ALMOST all writers of history dwell on the actions of men in their collective capacity. They describe the political and other machines set up by nations, states, or counties. The author ignores that method in his book, and chooses to follow families and single individuals from their entrance into the Sandy Valley to the end of their career, and tell what they have added to the history of the country.

The annals of almost every family noticed in this book have been furnished to us by a member of the family whose deeds we chronicle. We have guessed at nothing; and where necessary to give dates, have freely done so. We trust our book will be a valuable addition to the many books and periodicals treating on East Kentucky affairs, and that the people will appreciate our efforts to keep green in the memory of the rising generation the

great deprivations which their ancestry were compelled to undergo in order to rescue the Valley from the clutches of wild men and ferocious animals, and make it the abode of peace and plenty.

THE AUTHOR.

CATLETTSBURG, KY.

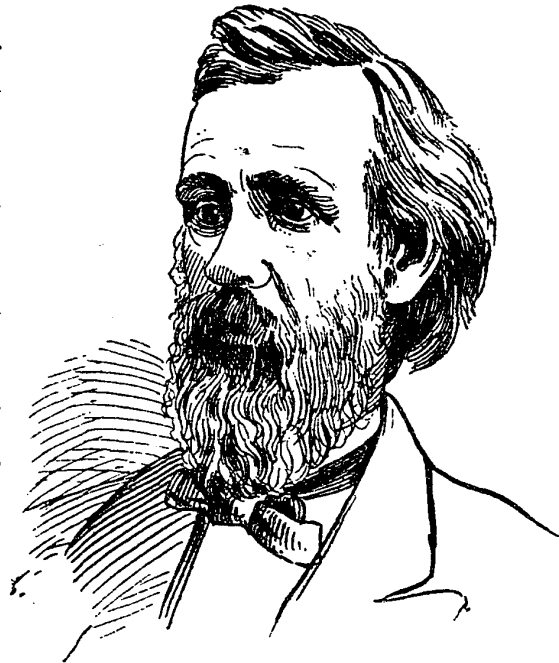
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## INTRODUCTION.

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I HAVE written the history of the Big Sandy Valley and its people with a view of being useful in my day and generation, by rescuing from oblivion many incidents of great moment, which, unless gathered up in book form, would be forgotten in this now fast, feverish age.

The history of a people is to tell who they are, from whence they came, and their characteristics, public acts and tendencies. The land wearing out in the old Colonial States, the people there began to look



WM. ELY, Author of this Book.

about for better land and cheaper livings. Kentucky, once a county of Virginia, was the nearest territory of unoccupied land to move to from Virginia, part of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and the

Carolinas. As early as 1789 the emigrants began to come to Sandy, and settle in the valley from those States. They knew that mountains and hills and streams would impede their progress; it dismayed them not, for most of them had, from near or far, looked upon the craggy peaks of the Alleghany, Blue Ridge, or Cumberland Mountains. On the point of land where the Sandy and Tug form a junction was the first settlement attempted, in 1789. Soon after, near the mouth of Pigeon, was the next; next at Pond Creek, on the Tug. All the inhabitants from these places were driven away by the Indians. Not until 1790 was it safe to stir up the redskins. Block-houses were built by the Damrons, and others, near Pikeville; by others near Prater Creek. The Aucstiers, or Auxiers, as now written, had built two, near the mouth of John's Creek. Over at Licking Station, now Salyersville, was a large fortification. At other places on the waters of the Sandy, similar forts had been erected to protect the early settlers from the tomahawk of the Indians. Our old pioneer ancestors were so well skilled in the use of the rifle, and were so brave, as to make it very hot for any red man to show himself in the valley. The Indians ceased troubling our forefathers and mothers in 1790, while they were murdering the whites, and stealing horses in the Scioto Valley as late as 1802. Yet game was much more abundant in the Big Sandy Valley than in the Scioto. It failed, however, to

tempt them over. By 1806 many of the old families, whose descendants are now our foremost people, had taken up their abode in the valley.

As the reader progresses along in this volume, the doings of those pioneers will be chronicled. The majority of the early settlers belonged to the best families of the older States. They, it is true, brought their household goods on the backs of horses, for no roads had been opened up. Many families brought with them their slaves, and for many years after the settlement of the country more slaves in proportion to the population were found on Sandy than in the Blue Grass region. They soon had pay-schools established in every neighborhood, to teach the young.

Churches they did not have, nor did they need them; for on large occasions they used the shady dells to worship God in, according to the sentiment of one of America's great poets, that the woods were "God's first temples." They did not forget to honor the great Creator, however, in neglecting to build churches, for every householder saw to it that one room in his great log mansion was dedicated to the worship of God. And not only did they open their houses to the preaching of the Word, but one family would often support a big meeting of a week's duration, sleeping and feeding all who came to worship. This primitive custom has not died out yet. Especially does it still prevail among the primitive Baptists in the Tug

Valley, where churches are few. The early pioneers ground their corn on hand-mills, or beat the grains to meal in a mortar. They used bear's-oil in place of lard to shorten their johnnycakes. It was many years before they had much hog-meat or beef; but bear, deer, turkeys, and other game and fowls were abundant, which more than supplied them with meat. Honey was almost as plentiful as sorghum is to-day; and every Spring they made of maple-sugar and treacle enough to run them through the season. In a word, they lived at the fountain-head. The skins of the bear, the deer, buffalo, and other fur-bearing animals, afforded a revenue of wonderful proportions, and when the reader takes into account the vast sum added by the countless wolf-scalps at five dollars apiece, and the ginseng crop, he feels that his ancestors were engaged in a more lucrative business than saw-logging. As to clothes, the thrifty housewife worked up the flax and cotton raised by the men, and prepared it for clothing for the family, and coverings for the beds, as well as table-cloths and towels. Even handkerchiefs were woven from the flax, and served on many occasions as wedding-gear. Many of the men could sport breeches made of dressed deer-skins, and shoes made of the same material were found on the feet of both sexes. When the wolves became less troublesome, sheep were raised, and supplied the people with another article of clothing, both for man and woman. Every house had a spinning-



wheel, a reel, and a loom, and the wholesome damsels of that day knew well how to use them; while the mother spun the flax and wool into thread, the old grandmother knitting the hosiery for the family, and the little girls filling the quills. Those were busy days. No idlers then.

The amusements of the people were adequate to their wants. House-raisings, log-rollings, corn-huskings, were engaged in by the men; wool-pickings, quiltings, and flax-pullings by the women; the latter participated in by the beaux and lasses. Many of those gatherings wound up at night with a play, and sometimes with a big dance.

The morals of the people were good. The men were brave, and the women virtuous. That handy little imp, the modern pistol, was almost unknown then. When men fell out, they generally very coolly fought it out with their fists, and ended the matter by shaking hands all round. No feuds then. Of course many drinkers to excess were found in that day, for men everywhere partook of the fiery beverage. But intoxication did not prevail as alarmingly as it has since the apple has become so large a factor in potent drinks on Sandy. We should say, however, that a great reformation has been going on for twenty years, and the sale of liquor is, in the Kentucky counties, outlawed by the people.

Christian progress and esthetic taste bid fair to raise the people of the valley to a higher plane than

is attained in any other part of the State. The somewhat isolated location has kept the valley exempt from the grosser vices of the age.

It is a good place to move to.