



JOHNNY APPLESEED.

History of Richland County, Ohio

by A. A. Graham, 1880.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"JOHNNY APPLESEED."

A HISTORY of Ohio, and especially of Richland County, would be incomplete without some account of this very eccentric individual, known as Johnny Applesseed from the fact that he was the pioneer nurseryman of Ohio.

Johnny Applesseed deserves a place in history among the heroes and martyrs, for he was both in his peculiar calling. His whole life was devoted to what he considered the public good, without regard to personal feeling, or hope of pecuniary reward. Not once in a century is such a life of self-sacrifice for the good of others known. There has been but one Johnny Applesseed; it is hardly possible there will ever be another.

He was born, according to one or two authorities, in Massachusetts, about the year 1775; was first heard of in Ohio about the year 1801, and was known to have traversed Richland County for the first time about 1811. The date of his birth is shrouded in uncertainty. Mr. C. S. Coffinberry writes the following regarding this matter: "He was born in the State of Massachusetts, but at what period the writer never knew. As early as 1780, he was seen in the autumn, for two or three successive years, along the banks of the Potomac River, in Eastern Virginia." If this be true, he must have been born some years before 1775. Why he left his native State and devoted his life to the planting of apple-seeds in the West, is known only to himself. He may have been insane, he was generally so considered to a certain degree. He was certainly eccentric, as many people are who are not considered insane; it is hard to trace eccen-

tricity to the point where insanity begins. He was certainly smart enough to keep his own counsel. Without doubt his was a very affectionate nature; every act of his life reveals this most prominent characteristic. From this fact alone writers have reasoned, and with good ground, that he was crossed in love in his native State, and thus they account for his eccentricity. This is only supposition, however, as he was very reticent on the subject of his early life. He was conscientious in every act and thought, and a man of deep religious convictions. He was a rigid Swedenborgian, and maintained the doctrine that spiritual intercourse could be held with departed spirits; indeed, was in frequent intercourse himself with two of these spirits of the female gender, who consoled him with the news that they were to be his wives in the future state should he keep himself from all entangling alliances in this. So kind and simple was his heart that he was equally welcome with the Indians or pioneers, and even the wild animals of the woods seemed to have an understanding with Johnny and never molested him. He has been variously described, but all agree that he was rather below the medium height, wiry, quick in action and conversation, nervous and restless in his motions; eyes dark and sparkling; hair and beard generally long, but occasionally cut short; dress scanty, and generally ragged and patched; generally barefooted and bareheaded, occasionally, however, wearing some old shoes, sandals or moccasins in very cold weather, and an old hat some one had cast off. It is said he was seen sometimes with a tin pan on his head, that served the double purpose of hat and

mush-pot, at other times with a cap made by himself of pasteboard, with a very broad visor to protect his eyes from the sun.

His diet was very simple, consisting of milk, when he could get it, of which he was very fond; potatoes and other vegetables, fruits, and meats; but no veal, as he said this should be a land flowing with milk and honey, and the calves should be spared. He would not touch tea, coffee or tobacco, as he felt that these were luxuries in which it was wicked and injurious to indulge. He was averse to taking life of any animal or insect, and never indulged in hunting with a gun.

He thought himself "a messenger, sent into the wilderness to prepare the way for the people, as John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for the coming of the Savior." He gathered his apple-seeds, little by little, from the cider presses of Western Pennsylvania, and putting them carefully in leather bags, he transported them, sometimes on his back, and sometimes on the back of a broken-down horse or mule, to the Ohio River, where he usually secured a boat and brought them to the mouth of the Muskingum, and up that river, planting them in wild, secluded spots all along its numerous tributaries. Later in life, he continued his operations further West. When his trees were ready for sale, he left them in charge of some one to sell for him. The price was low—a "fip-penny-bit" apiece, rarely paid in money, and, if people were too poor to purchase, the trees were given them. One of his nurseries was located on the flats, within the present limits of Mansfield, near where once stood the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago Railway Depot. His residence in Mansfield covered the period of the war of 1812, and several years following it. From this, as headquarters, he would occasionally make trips further West, and return again after an absence of two or three months. On these excursions, he probably visited his sister, Persis Broom, who lived in Indiana.

Mr. C. S. Coffinberry, who was personally acquainted with him, writes thus: "Although I was but a mere child, I can remember as if it were but yesterday, the warning cry of Johnny Appleseed, as he stood before my father's log cabin door on that night—the cabin stood where now stands the old North American in the city of Mansfield. I remember the precise language, the clear loud voice, the deliberate exclamations, and the fearful thrill it awoke in my bosom. 'Fly! fly! for your lives! the Indians are murdering and scalping the Seymours and Copuses.' These were his words. My father sprang to the door, but the messenger was gone, and midnight silence reigned without. * * * John Chapman was a regularly constituted minister of the church of the New Jerusalem, according to the revelations of Emanuel Swedenborg. He was also a constituted missionary of that faith under the authority of the regular association in the city of Boston. The writer has seen and examined his credentials as to the latter of these." He always carried in his pockets books and tracts relating to his religion, and took great delight in reading them to others and scattering them about. When he did not have enough with him to go around, he would take the books apart and distribute them in pieces.

He was really one of the greatest benefactors of Richland County, as large orchards flourished in different parts of the county as the result of his labor. Besides the cultivation of apple-trees, he was extensively engaged in scattering the seeds of many wild vegetables, which he supposed possessed medicinal qualities, such as dog-fennel, penny-royal, may-apple, hoarhound, catnip, wintergreen, etc. His object was to equalize the distribution, so that every locality would have a variety. His operations in Indiana began about 1836, and were continued ten years. In the spring of 1847, being within fifteen miles of one of his nurseries on the St. Joseph River, word was brought to him that cattle had broken into this nursery

and were destroying his trees, and he started immediately for the place. When he arrived, he was very much fatigued; being quite advanced in years, the journey, performed without intermission, exhausted his strength. He lay

down that night never to rise again. A fever settled upon him, and, in a day or two after taking sick, he passed away. "We buried him," says Mr. Worth, "in David Archer's graveyard, two and a half miles north of Fort Wayne."

