

CRANE TOWN DESTROYED

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The village of Cranetown was on Spoon River about four miles southwest from the little city of Lewiston, the county seat of Fulton county, state of Illinois. It was surrounded by a great primitive forest of about 300 acres enclosed on three sides by an ox bow bend of the river. On the south the bluffs arose to a height of 150 feet. These hills were heavily timbered, but not with such gigantic trees as grew in the valley below. At the time of which I write it was one of the finest tracts of native timber to be found anywhere in the state. On the north, along the banks of the stream, grew several hundred hard or sugar maple trees. The timber farther back consisted mainly of great unbending sycamores, soft maple, elm, hackberry, cottonwood, buckeye, walnuts of both kinds, and a fringe of willows along the river banks. Of the undergrowth there were large spaces covered with elderberry, much loved by the wild turkeys, patches of blackberry vines, kinnikinick, wahoo, several kinds of wild grape vines, both the three leaved and five leaved ivies, greenbrier, yellow root vines and in the lowest places were acres of wild balsams or touch me nots, much sought for by the humming birds for the nectar contained in their cub-like blossoms.

Big spaces were covered with stinging nettles; in places the ground was carpeted with a mass of wood violets, many jack-in-the-pulpits and an occasional trumpet creeper that climbed to the top of the big trees. The urban village of Cranetown was builded in the very tops of a half dozen of the giant syca-

mores that grew in a group close together. Each tree had from six to a dozen or more houses in it. In the summer time when all were at home, including the babies, the population was 100 or more. They were all fishermen and adhered strictly to business. They were peaceful people, minded their own business, bothered no one and asked only to be let alone. Here they had lived from time immemorial. It was a picturesque sight to stand on High point to the south and look over the intervening trees and see this village of tree dwellers in the tops of those giants of the forest towering over all the rest of the woods.

Like some others of our citizens the people of this village all journeyed to the south in the autumn and remained there through the winter time, but their domiciles remained and were conspicuous objects in the landscape for long distances around.

They were an industrious people, laboring day and night when the appetites of an hungry young family demanded much food of fish, crayfish and frogs. The Indians probably respected them and passed them by without molestation and so did the early pioneer hunters and farmers.

But this is a world of change. All things mundane must have an ending and so did this ancient village of Cranetown. The increase of population, the clearing of the forests and the introduction of modern firearms sounded their doom.

One time a part of us went down into this wood one bright moonlight night to cut an early found bee tree. Passing under Cranetown which was at a time when the young ones were nearly big enough to leave their nests, we were surprised at a great commotion raised by the three or four dogs that had accompanied us. Approaching we found them surrounding a great blue heron who was then on the ground with a broken wing. He was making a valiant fight for his life, stabbing at the dogs with his long dagger-like bill and every hit brought a howl. We called off the dogs and on examining the ground under the trees found a number of dead immature young birds.

Up in the nests in the tops of the trees other young birds were uttering hunger-distressed cries which plainly said, "We are deserted and very hungry."

We subsequently learned that a day or two before some young fellows from the city had been down here and with new fangled, hard-shooting guns had amused themselves as no Indian would have done by shooting up Cranetown. They had killed or crippled many of the young birds and some of the old ones that had ventured within range of their rifles.

The next year a lesser number of the herons came back and tried to resurrect the town, but they were again shot up and thenceforth Cranetown was a deserted village—a thing of the past.

It is not generally known that the birds were the original dancers, and of the several kinds of dancing birds the cranes "took the cake." Nearly all the Phasianidae at times do more or less dancing. The old wild gobbler, I have seen several times do a very neat "hoedown" and the darling little quails do a good imitation of a cake-walk. For a regular quadrille the sandhill cranes take the blue ribbon. In the early days I have seen a party of them on a high piece of ground on the Bushnell or West Prairie Country go through a stunt that would make a dog laugh. They would form a square and after a few preliminary bowings and salutings, they would promenade all, four hands forward and back, balance all and all the time with an accompaniment of clattering bills much like castanets, wings half raised, or an old male with one wing raised as he promenades with his partner. Of course it is all a matter of courtship and for that matter the modern dance is also.
