

Ten Years in Oregon

- 113 Early in March Mr. Jason Lee left for the west. The writer, having attended the Baltimore Conference, followed him on the 19th. At Pittsburg he was joined by Mr. Cyrus Shepard, from Lynn, Mass., one of the laymen engaged in the mission. From this city they took passage to St. Louis, Mo., where the writer arrived in the early part of April, a few days later. The necessary mountain outfit had already been sent up the Missouri in a steamboat, in the charge of Mr. Shepard, near the place where the company for the mountains was to form, and make the necessary arrangements previous to the commencement of the journey. Mr. Jason Lee and myself proceeded to Independence on horseback. This is on the western border of the state, and the point of departure whence many a party of fur traders and mountain trappers have set off on their hazardous adventures. A layman, Mr. P. L. Edwards, of Richmond, near Independence, was added to the number,
- 114 increasing the mission family to four; and Mr. C. M. Walker, of the same place, was hired a year, to cross the mountains, and assist in commencing the mission. After several days spent in rigging packs and pack-saddles, and making other provisions for our route, on the 27th of April everything was in readiness for our journey.

On the 28th we raised camp, and began our march toward the Rocky Mountains. The whole party numbered between fifty and sixty men, all mounted on horses or mules, and armed with rifles. Most of them had each a powder-horn or a flask, a large leathern pouch for bullets hung at his side, and buckled close to his body with a leathern belt, in which hung a scabbard of the same material, bearing a "scalping-knife," that savage weapon whose very name is a terror. The mules and horses altogether were over one hundred and fifty. Nearly one-third were for the men, and about two-thirds carried packs, each man leading two of them. Mr. J. Lee, besides the five horses to ride, one for each person with him and four to pack, took some cows, and two of them made the journey to Oregon. Their milk was quite a luxury on the way.

Captain Wyeth, who headed the party, had a gentlemen of Boston, Captain Thyng, for his assistant. Two naturalists were also in company, Mr. Townsend, of Philadelphia, and Mr. Nuttall, the gentleman mentioned in a preceding chapter, who accompanied Mr. Hunt some way up the Missouri in 1811. . . .

- 116 Leaving the Kansas we reached the Platte in thirteen days, past the middle of May, and pursued our course on the south side above the junction of the Forks. The Platte, as its name implies, is very shallow, and in some places more than a mile wide. The bottom is a quicksand, and in fording, it is necessary to keep in motion to prevent sinking. The water has a whitish appearance, and a thick sediment will deposite itself in a vessel in which it stands. The banks are low, and a level bottom covered generally with grass, extends a mile, more or less, on either side, terminated by hills. The country is destitute of timber. The beautiful antelope inhabits this region, and its flesh made a considerable part of our supply of food to the Forks of the Platte, the border of the buffalo range. The buffaloes have a stately appearance. Their shaggy heads, necks, and high humps above their shoulders, declining back to their tails, with their great size, give them an awkward and terrific aspect, that might awe a stranger and prevent his approach. They will "show fight" in self-defence when wounded and hard pushed by the hunters. They are fleet on a race, and it is a good horse that can beat them on a long one. Their flesh is excellent, equal, if not superior, to the best beef, and has long supplied the surrounding Indians and the white trappers with the means of supporting life in a region
- 117 otherwise uninhabitable. They are diminishing rapidly; but yet immense herds of many



thousands range from the Forks of the Platte to the head waters of the Lewis River, over a tract extending far north and south of the general thoroughfare to Oregon. Crossing the south fork of the Platte, Captain Wyeth led his company in a north-west direction to the north fork, which he was to follow to the base of the Rocky Mountains. The Black Hills lifted their summits to the north-west on our right. Having crossed the north fork, we left the river, whose course had been our guide for sixteen days, and proceeding westward, we reached the Sweet Water, one of its small tributaries, at Rock Independence, June 8th. This is a vast block of granite, covering from one to three acres, and rising some twenty or thirty feet above the ground. A fourth of July being once observed here by a party of traders, they gave the rock the name it now bears. In the year 1842, as a party of emigrants were passing this rock, two gentlemen tarried behind the main body to cut their initials upon. For this purpose they set by their rifles, and were busily engaged in making themselves immortal, by leaving their humble representatives on this grand portal of the Rocky Mountains--when, in the midst of their labour, they were suddenly surprised by a large party of Indians, who seized their rifles and horses, and then made them prisoners. Some of the party seemed determined to kill them on the spot, but were prevented by the authority of their chief. After learning that the party to which they belonged had gone on up the Sweet Water, they dashed forward on the trail, and soon overtook them; but before this, their approach had been discovered, and the party had thrown itself into as good a posture of defence as they possibly could. When the Indians had come within a short distance, they made a halt, and a few, leaving the main body, went forward into the space between, and held a parley with some of the whites, which resulted in the restoration of their prisoners, and

118 a peaceable separation--the Indians to the chase, and the emigrants to their journey. From Rock Independence, Capt. W. pursued his way several days up the Sweet Water, crossing it many times, its steep banks compelling him to take sometimes one side and then the other of its zigzag course. This stream cuts the Rocky Mountains, and opens through them a highway to Oregon. Some of their snowy tops are seen to the south. Leaving the Sweet Water, we soon came to the Big Sandy, a branch of the Colorado which flows into the Gulf of California, to which we arrived soon after, and crossing it, proceeding still westward, we came to Hain Fork, one of the tributaries, eleven days from Rock Independence, June 19th, and here we rendezvoused.