



Yours Truly

Wm. G. Johnston

From Daguerreotype, 1849.

EXPERIENCES

OF A

FORTY-NINER,

By WM. G. JOHNSTON,

A MEMBER OF THE WAGON TRAIN FIRST TO ENTER
CALIFORNIA IN THE MEMORABLE
YEAR 1849.

"Mammon led them on,
Mammon, the least crested spirit that fell
From Heaven; for e'en in Heaven his looks and thoughts
Were always downward bent: admiring more
The riches of Heaven's pavements, trodden gold,
Than aught divine or holy else enjoyed
In vision beatific; by him first
Men also, and by his suggestion taught,
Ransacked the centre and with impious hands
Sifted the bowels of their mother earth
For treasures better hid. Soon had his crew
Opened into the hill a spacious wound,
And digged out ribs of gold."
—Milton.

PITTSBURGH:
MDCCKCXCII.

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1892

MESSELMATES ON THE PLAINS.

- CRAWFORD WASHINGTON, Killed at Vicksburg, May 19, 1863.
- WM. OIL SCULLY, *Died in Pittsburgh, February 10, 1891.
- WM. H. McBRIDE, *Died in Chicago, September 20, 1873.
- CHAS. D. KINCAID, Died in Nicaragua, 1853.
- JOSEPH L. MOODY, Residing near San Francisco, 1892.
- WM. G. JOHNSTON, *Residing in Pittsburgh, 1892.

MESSELMATES OF THE NORTH FORK.

- JAMES R. MURPHY, Residing near Pittsburgh, 1892.
- GEORGE R. BARCLAY, Died in San Francisco, 1860.
- GEORGE RAPPERT, Died at the North Fork Camp, Nov. 18, 1849.

*Also members of the North Fork Camp.

3819

To my Messmates
of the Plains and Mountains,
and of the North Fork,
Living and Dead:

To those of them who yet with me pursue life's
journey, their steps bent towards a land
having a City, the Streets of which
are paved with Gold;
and

To the memory of those who,
"Life's fitful fever over,"
Sleep peacefully under the clobs of the valley:
In affectionate remembrance of
their friendship,
and of their many manly virtues,
This Volume is Dedicated.

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ERRATA.

On page 147, at the close of the paragraph, the word "latter" is used instead of "later."

On pages 164 and 165 a ludicrous error occurs in substituting the name of "Mrs. Bridger" for that of "Mrs. Vasquez," in the incident respecting a skillet lid.

PREFACE.

THE original intention of the writer in the preparation of the notes forming the basis of this work, was to preserve a record of such incidents as could be briefly jotted down from day to day, that in after years he might have at hand that which would aid in refreshing his memory concerning a journey which he foresaw must ever form a memorable epoch in his life.

When, after a lapse of more than forty years, a release from many of the active duties of a busy life afforded an opportunity for the revision of his manuscript, this was attempted solely for its presentation in a more suitable shape to his immediate posterity, and with no view of publication.

While it may seem a departure from the intention here set forth, that the work of the printer should be substituted for that of the scribe, it can scarce be regarded a wide one, when it is known that the circulation will still be restricted to a small circle of readers composed of friends and acquaintances who, upon personal grounds, might be thought to take an interest in a perusal of the volume.

Whilst adhering to the diary form in which the notes were originally made, this has not curbed a desire manifested in a number of instances, to take the wings of time to fly to periods even remotely in advance; an advantage moreover, only to be enjoyed when confining our readers within the limits above stated, since otherwise such a departure in the view of a more general public would have met with severe criticism, happily avoidable in the house of our friends.

THE AUTHOR.

INTRODUCTION.

MAKING THE TAIL-RACE OF A SAWMILL, AND WHAT
CAME OF IT.

IMPORTANT events in history not infrequently spring from others, which, in themselves, are of little moment.

When Captain John A. Sutter, hidden in the depths of a wilderness, and well nigh as far removed from the haunts of civilization as it was possible to be, was engaged in making a tail-race for his sawmill at Coloma, in Alta California, what imagination could have ventured the thought that this, in itself an insignificant affair, was to create a commotion that would be felt throughout the world.

The mill had been erected, its great water-wheel was in place and ready to revolve, but the tail-race had yet to be dug. This was speedily accomplished by a large force of Indians usually employed by this enterprising pioneer in such labors; after which the force of a mountain stream was turned into the newly made ditch. But something was not right, and the water had to be withdrawn; and thus it happened that the head workman, James W.

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10 *FIRST SYMPTOMS OF THE GOLD FEVER.*

Marshall, was enabled to discover some sparkling flakes of gold, which the current of water had brought to the surface of the excavation. This occurred on the 24th day of January, 1848; and it was this discovery that occasioned the upheaval above referred to.

The discovery of gold in California did not occasion much of a stir in the United States generally until late in the summer, or in the fall of the year mentioned. It was about this time that it became an event in which "our boys" at their evening sessions, in the back room of Jim Jones' drug store, became greatly exercised. In passing, I may say that the site of this pharmacy was that which had been the S. E. bastion of Fort Fayette, a structure of which the older families of Pittsburgh have some knowledge, and concerning it, as a link in the olden time chain, feel an interest; while, to come down a century later, on the same spot there now stands a business house, with which the writer has connection, viz., on the corner of Penn avenue and Ninth street. There it was that the adventures here recorded had a beginning.

Day by day information accumulated, confirming more and more the marvelous accounts of fortunes being made in a day, by those who happened to be earliest on the ground; and thus was it that the gold fever became contagious, and one after another of our number became infected by it. With this brief introduction, I proceed at once with the narrative.

EARLY VICTIMS OF THE CONTAGION. 11

CHAPTER I.

OUR PARTY—PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY.

NEVER having been far from home, the thought of an adventure of such magnitude as now seemed to loom up before me, possessed my mind more forcibly than any expectation of getting rich at gold digging. I had never looked out upon the Atlantic, and was confronted with the possibility of seeing both it and the mightier Pacific, and of setting foot on that far off Western coast, having as an appendage that long, narrow peninsula, only sufficiently wide to afford room on ordinary maps for the name "California;" a country which, for some unexplainable reason, had been in my mind always invested with some peculiar, inexpressible attractions.

It soon became a settled fact that a number of my associates would, at an early day, set out for this wonderful El Dorado, and I resolved to accompany them. These were: Messrs. George R. Barclay, Wm. O'H. Scully, Wm. B. McBride, Charles D. Kincaid and Joseph L. Moody. In a brief time arrangements were so far perfected, that we telegraphed to New York for passage on a line of steamers running to Chagres, and having connection

with another, affording transportation from Panama to San Francisco. The answer received was as follows:

NEW YORK, December 19, 1848.

WM. G. JOHNSTON: Passages for 15th February boat all taken.
PACIFIC CO.

Telegraphing once again for rates, and as to the time when the next steamer would sail, the following answer came:

NEW YORK, December 20, 1848.

WM. G. JOHNSTON: At this office, rates \$250, \$200, \$100. Advertised in New Orleans papers. Books for March steamer not opened until December 25.
\$1.55. PACIFIC MAIL S. B. CO.

These telegrams are yet preserved in my storehouse of relics, and it is curious to note the cost, marked as above, in contrast with the present low rates of wiring messages; and to further observe, that this was before the era of using printed blanks, and that the envelopes, also in excellent state of preservation, were sealed with red wafers.

Mr. Barclay determined not to be baffled by these replies, and finding a genial companion in our mutual friend Mr. James R. Murphy, who was willing to undertake a voyage in a sailing vessel around Cape Horn, the two made preparations accordingly, and were joined at Baltimore, from whence they sailed, by Mr. George Reppert, a cousin of Mr. Barclay, and also by a number of other gentlemen from

Pittsburgh; among them J. Heron Foster, founder of the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, and a jolly brush maker, one Robert Thompson.

Mr. Barclay had an uncle, a Pittsburgh banker, who furnished him with an outfit, and funds to make the voyage; and further made provision for being reimbursed, by adding to the outfit a number of neatly painted kegs, bound with stout iron hoops, which were to be returned by the nephew on his arrival in California, filled with gold dust!

This party sailed early in February, 1849, and as will be seen later on, arrived in San Francisco towards the end of August. For the remainder of our party, the long voyage thus undertaken had no fascination, but all were as intent as ever on reaching California. There yet remained the overland route from Missouri and other Western States, with wagons hauled by mules or oxen; and learning that parties were forming in many places for emigrating in this manner, we at length determined to undertake the journey. Some knowledge of what was in store for us was obtained from the recent report of Col. Fremont, and a work just published by Edwin Bryant, but it was by our after experience we were to learn more than could ever be found in books.*

*NOTE.—The vast territory lying west of the line of the Missouri frontier in the year 1849, was well nigh a *terra incognita*. River since the renowned expedition of Lewis and Clarke, at the beginning of the century, scarce anything had been done to open it up for emigration. Astor had made an ineffectual effort to establish a colony at the mouth of the Columbia River;

A valuable accession to our number was made in the person of Mr. Crawford Washington, a gentleman whom I early learned to esteem, and account worthy the name he bore; connected in fact with the family of the one who had rendered it so illustrious. A younger brother, Bushrod, had for some

and only within very recent years some daring adventurers had wended their way to Oregon, amid great hardships and perils, and made feeble beginnings in setting up the star of empire.

Fremont only within the past seven years had marked out the paths over plains, mountains and deserts, over which the future tide of emigration should travel, and had with his pen unfolded to the world his discoveries in the unknown land, while at the same time, with his sword, he added the land of gold to our possessions. And it was only within two years that the Mormons had begun their settlement at Salt Lake. With these exceptions, confined as is seen to a narrow strip along the Pacific coast, and a single point midway between the States and that far off ocean, there were not in all this vast region to be found any whites, if we except a very few missionaries among the Indians in the Eastern portion of what is now the State of Kansas; some roving bands of trappers in the Rocky Mountains; a small number of traders and voyageurs, at such posts as Fort Bridger and Bent's Fort, those of the American Fur Company, Fort Laramie and Hall's; and the military posts recently established on the Platte and Arkansas Rivers.

Reader, in this year of grace, 1849, take up the map of your country and glance at the cordon of populous States which within less than two score of years have been carved out of this domain—Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, the Dakotas, Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Oregon, Washington, Nevada and California! And these containing a combined population only a trifle short of seven millions! Then consider the cities, which as if by magic, have sprung into existence—abounding in enterprise, wealth and magnificence—San Francisco, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Kansas City, Denver and Portland! Observe too, those vast Continental railways, with their innumerable lateral branches; think of the network of electric and cable railways everywhere found in these go-ahead cities,—where also night is turned into day, by touching a button or turning a switch. And then after this hasty glance, I would have you contrast these things with the picture embraced within the first few lines with which this note begins. The place which once knew only the red man, knows him no more forever. The white man has well nigh wiped him from the face of the earth. He has built his palaces where once stood the lodge and the wigwam. He has reared cities and towns upon lands which, through untold ages, the Indian has been accustomed to consider his undisputed hunting grounds, the home alike of himself and the deer and buffalo, upon which he subsisted. And these animals too, countless when I first beheld them, as the stars of heaven or the sands on the seashore, for multitudes—how have they melted away! Ploping as it were in dread terror at the approach of the fast flying, screeching, smoking, snorting locomotive! In a word, civilization has succeeded barbarism.

years prior to this been numbered among our intimate associates, and it was thus we were brought together. Being some years our senior, and married, while we were all single, we naturally viewed Mr. Washington as a sort of ballast to keep the other members of the party steady. Possessed of a fine education, pleasing in manners, handsome in form and features, he was in the highest degree companionable, as I afterwards realized when on the plains we so often joggled along side by side.

Among other preparations, we contracted for two wagons; one modeled after those used by our government on the plains during the recent war with Mexico. It was light, yet strong; built of thoroughly seasoned wood, and in all details was well adapted for a journey such as was contemplated. It was fortunate that in this we exercised much care, as was realized in our after experience. The other wagon was smaller, and being intended for lighter use, we were less particular in regard to it.

Through the months of January and February, '49, we busied ourselves in getting in readiness for as early a start as possible; laying in a stock of provisions—pilot-bread, oatmeal, bacon-sides, coffee, sugar, salt, clothing, blankets, fire-arms, etc. Additions to this outfit were to be procured on reaching the frontier, where we could ascertain, from those familiar with the necessities for traveling on the plains, what further would be needed for the journey.

Toward the end of February we secured passage as far as St. Louis on the steamboat Shenandoah, Captain Bowman; the time fixed for our departure being Thursday, March 1st. On the evening of the appointed day we went aboard the steamer, where all was bustle, as though momentarily about to start. Relatives and friends, forming a numerous company, came to the boat to see us start, and to say "good-bye." By ten o'clock we were left to ourselves, and soon after it was ascertained that it would yet be several hours before the boat would start, as much freight had to be taken aboard. Reminded of a social gathering up town, where we might expect to meet many acquaintances, we repaired thither, and, as anticipated, spent an enjoyable evening.

As midnight approached, and we were compelled to return to the boat, it may be imagined that some tender words of farewell were spoken; but we must draw the curtain here, for when lovers part it is not meet that the cold gaze of the world should be upon them.

CHAPTER II.

JOURNEY TO THE FRONTIER.

AT an early hour of the morning of Friday, March 2d, the Shenandoah parted from her moorings, and we were soon after steaming down the beautiful Ohio. But little worthy of note happened on this part of the journey. One day was spent in Cincinnati, and a morning in Louisville, at both of which cities we diligently employed ourselves in sight-seeing. At the Galt House (Louisville) I met *Mr. Randolph Benton, son of the Missouri senator, and Mr. Edwin Bryant, author of the then popular work, "What I Saw In California," and late Alcalde of San Francisco. Mr. Bryant was about to form a company to make another journey across the plains, and Mr. Benton informed me that he had some thought of joining his party.

When near the mouth of the Ohio, an hour or so after dark, our boat took fire from a chimney stack becoming overheated. The pilot at once steered for the shore, but with a few buckets of water the flames were quickly extinguished. It

*In 1842, when but twelve years old, young Benton accompanied his brother-in-law, Lieutenant John C. Fremont, in his first expedition to the Rocky Mountains.

was fortunate that this fire occurred while the passengers were all astir; had it been in the night, after they had retired, the result might have been different.

Early on the morning of the 10th the boat pulled up at the St. Louis wharf. After breakfast we engaged passage on the steamer Sacramento, Captain Atkinson, and had our wagons and other freight transferred to that boat, on which we were to continue the journey up the Missouri River. This was a new steamer making its first trip; her name was in compliment to the then much talked-of river of the country whither so many emigrants were bound, a goodly share of whom the owners of the craft expected to help onward in their journey. Much of the day was spent in going through the busy streets of the city, satisfying curiosity in sight-seeing. The one building of prominence was the court house, through which we took a run. On one of its walls was a full length portrait of Clarke, the pioneer, who, in the days of President Jefferson, in company with Lewis, made the renowned overland journey to the mouth of the Columbia River. While in one of the court rooms, we chanced to hear the eminent lawyer, *Edward Bates, addressing a jury.

At the time of this visit, St. Louis had a population of 70,000, and Cincinnati 100,000. These figures have swollen many times since then, and

*Afterwards Attorney General in the Cabinet of Mr. Lincoln.

both places have become great cities, full of life and energy, but proportionately not more so than when we then saw them. St. Louis, however, has left Cincinnati far in the rear; while Chicago, which had then scarce more than a beginning, has now out-distanced St. Louis, and bids fair in a decade to outnumber even New York. Then the great West depended solely upon river transportation, while to-day, railroads cob-webbing almost the entire country, have well nigh made the river business obsolete.

On Sunday morning, March 11th, destined for the little frontier town of Independence, we left St. Louis, and were soon after steaming up the great, wide Missouri. We had on board a large crowd of passengers; every state room was occupied, and many were compelled to sleep on the cabin floor. Quite a number, we discovered, were bound for California; among these, two pleasant gentlemen whose acquaintance we made, Captains Maury and Stewart, both of whom, in the recent Mexican war, had commanded companies in a Kentucky regiment. At Jefferson City, the capital of Missouri, Governor King and about forty members of the legislature, bound for their respective homes, came aboard—that august body having just adjourned. Of many of these lawmakers we did not form favorable impressions, as they spent the hours of both day and night in gambling, and in drinking to excess.

Thursday, about midnight (March 15th), we reached a diminutive village glorying in the name of Wayne City, the landing place for the town of Independence, which lay four mile inland. Two hours later, having deposited us with our goods on shore, the Sacramento proceeded on its course up the river. Forthwith we busied ourselves in putting the wagons together, as for the convenience of transportation they had been taken apart when shipped at Pittsburgh. We were thus busily occupied until daylight, when we proceeded to a log house near to the river, and awaking its inmates, engaged them to prepare us a breakfast. Scarcely had we seated ourselves around a blazing log fire, quite grateful to our feelings after the long exposure in the chill air of the morning, when we observed the Sacramento returning and heading towards the landing, but tying up at a point nearly a mile further up. Soon after, two men landed from the boat and walking briskly to where we were, demanded of us their wagon cover, which, they claimed, had been put ashore with our goods. It was soon evident to us that a mistake had been made, and it was equally plain that the cover they sought, and found in our possession, was greatly inferior to our own, which only then we discovered was missing. This not being ours, we were glad to restore it to the claimants, who doubtless were the proper owners; and thereupon we set out for the boat to make search for our missing

property, and were speedily rewarded for our labor in finding it carefully stowed away in the wagon bed of the very men who had compelled the boat to return for their cover!

After this morning exercise and encounter with the sharp March air, our appetites were well whetted and we did ample justice to the plentifully supplied table spread before us. That appetizing meal is even yet remembered, and I recall how the ham and eggs, hot biscuit, corn bread and coffee vanished from sight. After this repast we proceeded on foot to Independence and put up at a tavern which bore the name of the town.

It soon became evident that it would be several weeks before we could proceed on our journey westward. We had yet to purchase mules and numerous things needed on the plains, and time would be required for the grass to grow upon which the animals must subsist. Accordingly, it was determined to select a suitable place for camping, as that mode of life would better suit our limited purses, and by it also, it was thought, we would become more readily inured to hardships such as we might expect to encounter on the plains. With this end in view, after dining, four of our party rode to the country west of Independence, eight miles distant therefrom, where, at the edge of a scrub oak forest, belonging to the plantation of a Mr. Rice, they selected a site for our new mode of life. Mr. McBride and myself

remaining in town, occupied the afternoon in visiting the stores and a daguerreotype gallery, with its frightful array of portraits. The streets, as yet, were quiet, showing no signs of the great bustle so noticeable a month later when the town was overflowing with intending emigrants. When night came our party were the occupants of three beds in a large room on the second floor of the inn. When about to retire our pistols were placed on a table in the centre of the room, to have them handy in case of a night attack, as was humorously suggested; but by some careless handling of mine the hammer fell on the cap, instantly discharging the contents upon the opposite side of the street. Our candle was hastily blown out and in a twinkling all were abed, ready to be soundly asleep should any approach to our room be made. No harm, however, was done; none, at least, that we heard of, though all were badly scared. In the morning a clean-cut hole in the window pane of the room showed where the bullet had passed in its flight.

CHAPTER III.

FORTY-ONE DAYS OF FRONTIER CAMP LIFE.

SATURDAY, March 17th.—Engaging two ox teams this morning, we returned to the river landing and brought from thence our wagons and their contents. After dining at the Independence House, we proceeded to the place chosen for a permanent camp, reaching it about five o'clock. Our route, after passing through some beautiful woodlands immediately west of the town, lay over an undulating plain called the "Blue Prairie."

Grass was just beginning to show itself above the surface of the ground, for a winter of unusual severity was being followed by a backward spring. We were joined by three of our recent fellow travelers on the steamer Sacramento, who intend camping near us. We pitched our tent in a small clearing, surrounded by hickory saplings, behind which was a dense thicket of scrub oaks. Convenient to the camp was a spring of excellent water. Building a fire, we prepared supper, which consisted of a prairie chicken (shot by Washington in the afternoon), fried bacon and coffee. Gathered around our camp chest for the first time, and it covered with a dazzling array of new tin plates and cups, we fared sumptuously.

Supper over and dark coming down, we piled high the logs on the fire, and, seated around it with well filled tobacco pipes, recounted adventures of the past, and conjured up visions of the future until bed time. Spreading rubber blankets on the ground within the tent, and upon these a couple of buffalo robes, and wrapping about us heavy woolen blankets, notwithstanding the night was wintry cold we slept soundly and comfortably until the morning light stole in at the tent door. Thus passed the first day and night of our new Bohemian life.


SUNDAY, March 18th. — We spent the day in reading and in taking short walks in the neighborhood; performing no labors except such as necessity imposed. A mule dealer called upon us, wishing to sell us some stock, and promised to return again shortly.

MONDAY, March 19th. — Arranging matters to make the camp in all its appointments as convenient as possible occupied the day. Appearances of an approaching storm in the afternoon led us to dig a deep trench around our tent, and to place our goods under secure cover. But the clouds passed harmlessly by. Washington and Kincaid went to town for the purpose of purchasing mules.

TUESDAY, March 20th. — A day's fishing with Mr. McBride on the Big Blue River, said to be a mile or two distant, consisted of getting lost in the

woods, and wandering about promiscuously—of inability to find bait on reaching the stream; of being forced to return; and once more in renewing the experience of wandering about. A log cabin on the edge of the forest brought hope, while a couple of dogs sunning themselves on the porch, growled us a welcome; this too, seconded by the hostess, who bade us await the return of her husband, who coming shortly, asked us to join them at their noonday meal. We needed no urging to accept the invitation to partake of the usual fare of frontier people: ham and eggs, corn bread, onions and coffee. Our good host, named Irwin, formerly resided in Pennsylvania, and on learning that we also hailed from that State, this gave assurance of an additional welcome. Dinner over, Mr. Irwin escorted us a short distance on our way, and pointed out the direction of our camp, which we soon reached. In the evening our committee on locomotives returned from Independence, reporting the purchase of eight Spanish mules, from a dealer named Irwin, who agreed to have them in charge until the middle of the coming month, unless needed sooner. They paid at the rate of seventy-two and a half dollars for each mule.

WEDNESDAY, March 21st. — To-day the mule committee again returned to Mr. Irwin's farm, to brand the animals purchased yesterday. The instrument commonly used for this purpose is an iron plate, with a letter or other device cut on it, and is

attached to a handle about three feet long. Ours is a diamond K, thus ; this having been the mark used in shipping our goods at Pittsburgh. The mode of branding mules is this: by means of a rope drawn backwards and forwards a number of times, the animal to be branded is fastened securely to the side of a wagon; and the brand being heated in a fire close by, is applied usually about the hips of the beast; burning off the hair, and making a mark which is indelible. The unwritten law of the plains determines the ownership of strayed or stolen animals by these brands.

Washington and Kincaid got back to camp in the evening, bringing with them samples of the mules bought; also, a web of muslin to make sacks in which to put our provisions, in place of the boxes and barrels in which they are now packed. We employed ourselves in making these sacks, until dark.

FRIDAY, March 23d. — With the intent of visiting the postoffice to get letters, two of our party went to town, while Mr. Washington, with a shot gun over his broad shoulders, started for the corn fields to hunt prairie chickens. Night brought the stragglers home, without letters and without game.

SATURDAY, March 24th. — This morning was spent in packing groceries and other provisions in the sacks recently made. By this use of sacks, we dispense with heavy boxes and greatly reduce our load; and it is thought also they will prove serviceable in the

frequent packing and unpacking of our wagon to which we will be subjected in the course of our travels, being light and easily handled.

Since beginning camp life, three gentlemen who camped near us, and another who subsequently joined them, have messed with us, but their party having still further increased, they to-day set up dining quarters for themselves.

SUNDAY, March 25th. — A thick coating of ice was found this morning on the water bucket beside our tent door. We visited some new neighbors to-day, encamped a short distance off. Some of them have had much experience with life on the plains, and withal are very agreeable fellows. They cordially invited us to become their companions on the intended march, and we concluded that it would be highly advantageous to unite with them. Another cold night.

MONDAY, March 26th. — Our coffee pot accidentally upset, just as we sat down for our morning meal, and it was only natural that there should be some growling on account of the delay occasioned. A letter from home contained quite a budget of news, and being the first received since leaving, was listened to attentively, when at night it was read by the light of the camp fire. It was wonderful how absorbing the interest manifested respecting even the most trivial matters happening in our absence.

TUESDAY, March 27th. — To-day we erected a wooden horse and vise, such as coopers use, and with this and a draw-knife manufactured a large supply of tent and

picket pins for future use. Thus far we have been favored with dry weather, but this evening there was rain, and going early to bed, we fell asleep to the music of rain drops pattering on our muslin roof.

WEDNESDAY, March 28th.—Rain was still descending when we awoke, and we cooked and ate as it fell upon us. In a few hours it ceased, but the air was chilly, and mud abounded in an unpleasant degree. By noon the sun came out, after which it became pleasant. Letter-writing and camp duties employed us through the day. McBride surprised us at supper with an excellent cake of his baking, the first warm bread we have had. It was made of cornmeal, and being baked in a skillet covered with wood ashes, was greatly relished. Our meals usually consist of fried bacon (ham and sides by turn), pilot-bread soaked in water and fried in bacon fat, and coffee; eggs we have frequently, either boiled or fried; often a pot of oatmeal mush; and occasionally a stew of dried apples. For dinner, now and again we have bean soup, without other accompaniment, and this is always a favorite dish. We might have prairie chickens frequently, but for the labor of tramping after them through muddy fields, and spending much time without sufficient compensation.

Rain again fell heavily through the night, ceasing about daybreak.

THURSDAY, March 29th.—Two more mules were added to our stock to-day, bought for sixty dollars each. Letters for different members of the mess were received. Day pleasant.

FRIDAY, March 30th.—The grass grows with provoking slowness, though somewhat aided by the recent rains. The prevailing expectation is that in about ten days its growth will be sufficient to allow us to start on our journey; but we may be obliged to carry with us a supply of corn for occasional use. Mr. Scully visited Independence to-day to make sundry purchases, and returning brought a package for Mr. Washington, containing letters of introduction from Judge Crawford, of Washington, D. C., to certain of the military authorities of California, and one from Senator Benton to Colonel Fremont.

The information reached us to-day that a small detachment of a company from Pittsburgh, commanded by Captain Wm. J. Ankrum *en route* for California, had made a landing at Wayne City, and strolled up to Independence after night fall, where a "bust" of no small proportions was indulged in. Store signs were taken down, boxes piled in the middle of the streets, and sundry other depredations committed, when the marauders returned to their boat, greatly delighted, it may be, with their performances. This company, we learn, intends making St. Joseph its starting point.

SATURDAY, March 31st.—A young man, Lowry Adams, grandson of Mr. Rice, owner of the plantation on which we are encamped, is anxious to emigrate with us, in the capacity of teamster. He complains of ill-treatment on the part of his grandfather, and proposes to run off. To this we are unwilling to

30 VISIT INDEPENDENCE: BUSTLING TOWN.

assent, but will accede to his proposition if he will first notify the old planter, and then make application to us. He has at length consented to do this, but with no small reluctance.

SUNDAY, April 1st.—Burning the fingers of my right hand as I attempted to lift a camp kettle from the fire during breakfast time, while it did not put me in a very thankful frame of mind, recalled the fact that this was April fool's day. Whilst taking a walk with Mr. McBride over the neighboring prairie, we visited the camp of Col. Russell, composed of a large party, among whom we had numerous acquaintances, with whom we spent some pleasant hours.

MONDAY, April 2d.—A cold rain fell upon us whilst we prepared breakfast; and excepting sitting down to eat it under such circumstances, scarce anything more disagreeable can be imagined in camp life. Mr. McBride and myself rode to town this morning, to exchange one of the mules recently purchased, it not having proved satisfactory. We dined at the Noland House, but would have preferred our camp fare. The little town was crowded with people, oxen and mules. The stores were jammed with customers; whips were cracking in all directions; and the utmost confusion prevailed. Everybody seemed to be getting ready to start for California; and impatient, too, to go at once. Leaving Mr. McBride to remain over night to finish some matters of business, I returned alone. It was still raining, but I was closely

MANY TEAMSTERS.—MEET PITTSBURGHERS. 31

enveloped in an India rubber coat, and but for the miry road, would not have been greatly inconvenienced by the storm.

Lowry Adams having concluded to remain with his grandfather, I made a number of inquiries as to teamsters, and discovered that scores of them could be obtained, who were anxious to "roll out," as is the common expression with reference to going to California. On my way I fell in with a Mr. Phelps, who had been Quartermaster in Doniphan's regiment in the late war with Mexico; and I was greatly interested by a number of his experiences on the plains of which he gave me some account. At a boarding-house by the roadside at which I halted, I found a number of Pittsburghers preparing to emigrate, among them Messrs. Joseph C. McKibben, James B. Mitchell, A. W. Brockway, Harry Myers and Thomas Kennedy. I learned that two of their number during my absence had been to our camp and dined. They pressed me to take a meal with them, but as night was approaching, and the rain continued to fall, I thought best to decline their invitation. Reaching camp at dusk, it was still raining, but I found considerable comfort under shelter of the tent, where a warm supper was already spread.

TUESDAY, April 3d.—All night long the rain continued to fall; was pattering on our muslin walls when morning awoke us, and fell unceasingly through the day. Our meals were eaten under shelter of the tent. Mr. Washington and myself, differently inclined

from the rest of the party, who through most of the day sat shivering in the tent, preferred working in the rain. Gathering stones, we built a substantial fire-place; and when this was finished went with our axes to a clump of hickory saplings, and laid in a large supply of fire wood. Mr. McBride returned from town, accompanied by two young men on the lookout for positions as teamsters. They were quite respectable in appearance, and had shown considerable pluck in accomplishing their journey thus far. They had traveled on foot from New York City to Brownsville, Pa., and from thence had worked their passage on steamboats. After dining with us they returned to Independence. As a result of their visit they obtained situations as desired, shortly afterward.

WEDNESDAY, April 4th.—Mr. Edwin Bryant and members of his company have just reached Independence, and intend camping near the town, while awaiting the growth of grass.

FRIDAY, April 6th.—Rain fell during the night, and again quite heavily about noon to-day. Clearing up, I undertook to do some laundry work. When I saw the result of my labors fluttering in the breeze, I felt proud of my success, but nevertheless could not repress the wish, that wash day would not often occur.

I received to-day from Colonel Sam. W. Black, some letters of introduction; one was to General Bennett Riley, Military Governor of California, and another to General Persifer F. Smith, commanding the Pacific



WM. O'H. SCULLY.

From Daguerreotype, 1851.

COL. SAM. W. BLACK'S LETTERS.

33

Division.* Mr. Scully likewise received an introductory letter in Latin, addressed to the Catholic Bishop of Monterey. Rumors are prevalent of cholera having broken out among some emigrants encamped near Independence.

SATURDAY, April 7th.—A reporter for the *St. Louis Republican* paid us a visit, taking down our names for publication. From him we learned that Captain Ankrum's Pittsburgh company, encamped at St. Joseph, whither he had recently been, numbered two hundred and seventy-one men.

As a result of a day's hunt in the neighboring woods, Messrs. Washington and McBride brought in three squirrels and a wood-duck, being the only game they came in sight of. Again we had rain in the evening.

SUNDAY, April 8th.—Our Pittsburgh friends, the Kennedys, Brown, Mitchell and McKibben, dined with us to-day. Like ourselves they are waiting for grass to grow. At dusk a rain storm began, accompanied by loud peals of thunder and vivid lightning, continuing after night.

* As an opportunity for presenting these letters never occurred, they are still in my possession, and preserved as mementoes of the large-hearted, gallant soldier who penned them. The one to General Riley I copy here as a sample of both.

PITTSBURGH, March 31st, 1849.

Br. Brig.-Gen. Riley, Comm'g. &c.

MY DEAR SIR:—Messrs. Wm. G. Johnston, Chas. Kincaid, Wm. Scully, Crawford Washington, Wm. B. McBride and Jos. L. Moody are going in a body to California. Jointly and severally they are gentlemen, all of whom I commend from my heart to yours. If you can serve them I am sure you will do it. Although I cannot recompense you for this and other kindnesses, I will acknowledge a deep debt of gratitude on my death bed.

Always truly,
SAM'L W. BLACK.

MONDAY, April 9th. — As rain continued falling we ate breakfast in the tent. When the rain ceased a heavy wind swept the prairies, increasing to a gale towards night.

TUESDAY, April 10th. — With Messrs. Washington and Scully I spent the day hunting in the woods, and on our return to camp we brought nine squirrels as a result of the tramp.

WEDNESDAY, April 11th. — One large cat-fish was the sum total of a day's fishing at the Big Blue River, Messrs. Scully, McBride and myself being concerned in this catch.

It was decided this evening that cooking for the mess should be performed by each one in turn, for a month at a time; and the order of service was arranged by drawing cuts. Mr. McBride drew for the first, and I for the second month.

THURSDAY, April 12th. — Rain fell steadily throughout the day, so that we clung closely to the shelter of the tent; occupying the time mainly in reading and writing.

FRIDAY, April 13th. — Scouring the country around for a mule which had strayed off, gave us employment for the day; but without success.

SATURDAY, April 14th. — Ice fully half an inch in thickness was found in our water bucket this morning.

At nine o'clock the neighboring camps of Paul* and Johnston struck their tents, to begin the march

* Paul's company was the first to enter California, but with pack mules, having abandoned their wagons on reaching the Rocky Mountains.

westward; being the foremost in the long line of caravans which are to make memorable the year 1849, for the exodus across the plains and mountains stretching to the Pacific. These had intended forming part of our train, but becoming impatient at our delay, they concluded to proceed without us.

Whilst at dinner, a blinding snow storm came up, lasting for an hour. The white robe of snow covering the earth has such a wintry aspect, that we feel a fresh blight is thrown over our prospect for "rolling out;" while to our friends already started, the effect must be to occasion feelings of great despondency. Mr. McBride, who started yesterday in search of the lost mule, returned with it this evening, having found it tied to a fence about a mile to the east of Independence.

SUNDAY, April 15th. — Captains Maury and Stewart, our fellow travelers on the steamer Sacramento, and several others of their friends from Louisville, dined with us to-day, after which they rode out to the Big Blue River, intending to form a camp there. Several of our party accompanied them to assist in the selection of a site. On our way we stopped at the camp of Colonel Russell, and were hospitably entertained by that gentleman and others. Whilst there, Mr. Edwin Bryant, who had been at the river selecting ground for his company, rode up, and with him and Dr. Clinton I returned to camp, where I found Messrs. Mitchell and Kennedy, who were paying us a visit.

36 KAW INDIANS VISIT.—CURIOUS DOCUMENTS.

MONDAY, April 16th. — An Illinois company, which has been encamped in our neighborhood, to-day took up its line of march. We had a visit this morning from a number of Kansas Indians—"Kaws" as they are commonly called. Among them was a chief, two squaws, and a roach, the latter being their designation for a young warrior. They were possessed of a number of certificates, bearing the signatures of Indian agents; but very curious were the statements of facts contained in them. That of the chief was a black, greasy, almost indecipherable document, which doubtless had borne the smoke of many a "lodge" in some vast wilderness." It set forth the fact, that the bearer was *en route* to Washington, on business for his tribe. It bore date 1831! The mission for which it was written, was perhaps accomplished when General Jackson was the great father at the capital. The paper of a squaw bore evidence that the bearer thereof was a mighty warrior chief! Like discrepancies were observable in the various papers held by the several members of the tribe. They asked for sugar, but instead we gave them a cup of molasses; a substitute which gave immense satisfaction. It was amusing to watch them, as, one after another coming forward, they dipped their fingers into the cup and brought the streaming treacle to their lips with great gusto. We also gave them bread and tobacco; the latter especially occasioned them much delight. But these evidences of our good will only stimulated them to prolong their stay, in hope of additional bequests, so that we were

HAIR CROPPING.—JOE BAGBY ENGAGED. 37

at length forced to give them invitations to retire. It was soon quite manifest that they were wholly unfamiliar with such tokens of civilized life, and we were at length obliged to be somewhat rude, when at the point of a musket, we compelled them to leave camp.

My crop of hair having grown more rapidly than the grass, Mr. McBride proposed being my barber. In no wise fastidious, under present circumstances, as to style, I felt no serious concern as to the mode adopted, quantity rather than quality being the desideratum.

Applications on the part of persons anxious to go to California to become our teamsters are numerous, while in several instances engagements which we have entered into with such applicants have been broken. Possibly on account of receiving more favorable opportunities they have not hesitated to disappoint us. To-day our friend Irwin, from whom we had purchased most of our mules; recommended a young man named Joseph Bagby, who had driven a team in Price's regiment during the Mexican war. We had an interview with Bagby, and he is to join us on Sunday next. We learned to-day of a letter having been received from a former citizen of Independence confirming previous accounts as to the abundance of gold in California, and containing specimens said to be as large as beans. Snow storms and all other dis-

couragements melt away when such evidences of what is in store for us are produced. Gold as big as beans!

TUESDAY, April 17th.—The tide of emigration westward increases, and almost hourly we have fresh evidences of this, as wagon after wagon, some drawn by oxen and others by mules, roll past. Our proposed guide, Jim Stewart, whom we have not yet seen, but who we understand is to be connected with Captain Pye's mess, and whose headquarters are in the town, sends us occasional greeting, always telling us to be in no haste. He says that the parties starting thus early are making woful mistakes, as there is no grass to sustain their animals, and that when once we take up the line of march he will engage to pass "every mother's son of them."

Daily we witness the breaking in of mules by emigrants who go past, and thus have a foretaste of what is in store for us. Plunging, kicking, throwing off the uncomfortable gear, lying down, rolling and running off, with hoofs striking out in every direction, are common sights. All hands were at work to-day laying in a fresh supply of wood for fires. I spent part of the day in making sundry personal preparations; among other things, a cover for a Springfield musket which I purchased in St. Louis, having while there sent back to my home an uncommonly fine English bird gun which I learned would be useless on

the plains. I also made leathern cases for my pistol and hunting knife, which are to be carried on a belt around my waist in the regular backwoods style. With a woollen stocking I covered my tin canteen, as in this way when carrying water on the march it can be kept cool, even when exposed to the rays of a broiling sun. And lastly I cast bullets for my fire-arms, moulding enough for a seven years' war, or to stock a garrison. Thus prepared, I felt assurance of being in full fighting trim.

Colonel Russell's large train began its march to-day.

WEDNESDAY, April 18th.—Among the many teams that rolled past to-day were those of our friends Brockway, McKibben, etc. A large number of government wagons from Santa Fe went by. These will probably be sold in Independence to emigrant parties. Three of our party who went last evening to Irwin's returned to-day, bringing with them eight mules and three horses. They had, while at his farm, made a trade with Mr. Irwin, giving him a favorite dun mule for two other animals. Great fault was found at this barter by some members of our mess, and it was the occasion of a bitter quarrel this evening; one never afterwards healed. Cordial relations, I regret to say, were severed. At times the fire smouldered, but again and again it burst forth into flames on the plains.

40 FRACTIOUS OXEN.—FIGHTING EMIGRANTS.

Back of this unpleasant occurrence lay the fact that Mr. Washington had been selected captain of our mess, which fact had excited the jealousy of one of our number who aspired to the position. Mr. Washington cared nothing for such honors; he was at all times ready and anxious to do his part, and was, moreover, too proud and too magnanimous to resent any bickerings on the part of opponents, although like others of our number he could not but be greatly annoyed by them. Personally I had no part, either in the origin or continuance of the quarrel, but as the known friend of Mr. Washington my position could not be questioned.

One of the mules, when being driven to camp, strayed off and had to be abandoned for the night. A lot of oxen, about sixty in number, were driven past us to-day; some were yoked together, but the greater part having no such restraint, seemed wild and uncontrollable, fighting and goring each other, pulling down fences, and cutting antics generally. We obtained quarters for the mules in Mr. Rice's barnyard.

Quarrels among emigrants in the town occur with great frequency; to-day there is a report of a man having been killed in one of these skirmishes.

THURSDAY, April 19th.—An early search was made for our lost mule, and after a few hours it was recovered. Our friend, John S. Willock, of

DUMPLING DINNER.—ACTIVE INDEPENDENCE. 41

Pittsburgh, paid us a visit and took dinner with Captain Pye. We also entertained members of Col. Russell's company.

Mr. McBride astonished us at dinner by setting before us a pot of apple dumplings which he had cooked with consummate skill.

FRIDAY, April 20th.—The passing by of emigrant trains westward bound is become so common an occurrence each day as to be no longer a novelty, and to note the fact would be both wearisome and monotonous. About forty wagons, mostly drawn by oxen, went past us in the course of a few hours to-day, while large numbers going by other roads, of course escape observation.

Our neighbors in general gathered around our camp fire to-night, and with song and story until near midnight we passed the hours cheerily.

SATURDAY, April 21st.—Camp business took me to Independence this morning. Noise and confusion reigned supreme there. Traders, trappers and emigrants filled the streets and stores. All were in a hurry, jostling one another, and impatient to get through with their business. The salesmen were overworked, but good nature aided them in preserving their tempers. Mules and oxen strove for the right of way. "Whoa" and "haw" resounded on every side; while the loud cracking of ox goads, squeaking of wheels and rattling of chains, mingled with the oaths of teamsters, produced a din indescribable.

Our guide, Jim Stewart, for the first time visited our camp, staying over night. Like many frontier men he is addicted to gambling; and it was feared that its fascinations under the multitude of present opportunities, might lead him to disappoint us, or at least occasion unnecessary delay. On our arrival here, the one whose name was to us most familiar, and whom most of all we felt anxious to secure for a guide,—and we were by no means alone in this,—was Kit Carson, whose connection with Col. Fremont's explorations had given him such wide celebrity. Carson, however, could not be found, and we afterwards learned that he had not left his home in Toas, New Mexico. But among frontier people, especially those in the neighborhood of Independence, we learned of one even more highly regarded, and as better fitted for an adventure such as we were about to undertake. This was Jim Stewart, who by some good fortune, we afterwards ascertained was to be our near neighbor, connected with Capt. Pye's mess. Had it been our intention to hunt buffalo, trap beavers, or fight Indians, Carson, so we were told, would perhaps be entitled to the preference; but to be in charge of an emigrant train, to order each day's march, to say where to encamp, and how to take care of mules, it was declared that Stewart had no equal. This was the universal testimony of those who know what was required, from their own personal acquaintance with prairie

life; and this, in the light of subsequent experience, became our verdict, and that of thousands who crossed the plains in '49, and learned what this intrepid leader had been able to do. For years Stewart had been in charge of the trains of traders going back and forth between Independence and Santa Fe and Chihuahua, and such being his reputation, Col. Doniphan, in command of a detachment of the renowned "Army of the West" during the Mexican War, had selected him as wagon master. He had, moreover, experience in fighting Indians, and was reputed also to be an expert buffalo hunter. At the battle of Sacramento, although owing to his position he was neither expected or required to enter into the engagement, he was conspicuously prominent in the charge that was made, and was close at the side of Col. Owens when that gallant officer fell in that memorable fight.

His chief value to us was his knowledge of mules, the attention they required, their powers of endurance, and of the amount of food, water and rest necessary in maintaining them. Our neighbors, moreover, who were to be our companions on the plains, were in general Missourians, most of whom had led the same life as Stewart, and had been with him through the Mexican campaign. They understood mules as though they were blood relations, and we afterwards found them ready for any emergency. Stewart was their beau ideal of

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44 CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR LEADER.

a teamster. He was by birth a Scot, about forty years of age, of medium height, hair red and curly, ruddy complexion, wiry, herculean in strength, and quick as lightning in thought and action. He cared more for mules than for men, and considered it his first duty to look out for them; the men, he always said, could take care of themselves. He seemed too, as one born to command; his word was law, and once uttered, was never questioned. Experience had ripened his judgment as to make it acknowledged by those who knew what was meant by experience. Autocrat that he was, he ever maintained the regard and confidence of all. In the national gallery at Edinburgh is a grand picture, by Drummond, of Montrose mounted on a cart on his road to execution. In the windows of Muray House, on one side of the street through which the procession is passing, are posted his enemies, Argyle, Lorne, Loudon and others, as if to be witnesses of his supposed humiliation. Proudly erect and never deigning to notice their presence, a hero in figure and in every lineament of his countenance, as though fresh from victory and crowned with laurels, the noble Scot rides on undaunted. When first I saw that great picture, instantly the figure of Jim Stewart was recalled to my view, so much did he resemble his far-famed countryman in person and in manners.

Our driver, Joe Bagby, joined us to-night. This day has been the warmest we have yet had, and

KIND OFFERS.—TRAGIC DEATH OF MR. WHITE. 45

the temperature seems to have the effect of increasing the tide of emigration, which in a continuous stream has poured past us all day long.

SUNDAY, April 22d.—A large company of Mexican traders from Santa Fe went by. Some of their wagons were drawn by as many as ten mules.

MONDAY, April 23d.—A hard rain began falling in the night, continuing through most of the day, much to my discomfort while acting as cook. We feel under much obligation to Mr. Irwin, from whom we have purchased mules, and to Mr. White, a storekeeper in Independence, for many acts of kindness. Each has offered to give us credit for such length of time as we might require for anything needed, and the former even tendered the loan of money should we find ourselves wanting. Such marks of confidence on the part of strangers are truly flattering, while they do not fail to excite our gratitude. Our purses are growing slim, but we have no thought of availing ourselves of such offers on the part of these kind friends.

About a year after the time of which we now write, Mr. White concluded to remove his business to Santa Fe, and started thither with a stock of goods accompanied by his wife. When within a short distance of their destination, they were met by a band of Apache Indians. Mr. White was murdered and his wife taken prisoner. Kit Carson and a party from Toas, learning of this, went at

once in pursuit of the savages, but just as they came in sight of them they killed Mrs. White and fled. When Carson and his party came up to where the Indians had been, the body of the murdered woman was yet warm. No time was lost in following the miscreants and in dealing out severe punishment, several of them being killed within a few hours. But how small such compensation for the valuable lives destroyed!

TUESDAY, April 24th.—Among the tide of emigrants to-day was a large company from Cincinnati, well equipped. They wore uniforms similar to those of Uncle Sam's soldiers. Their wagon beds were made of iron, light and portable, and it is claimed for them that they will be found specially suited for crossing rivers, not requiring caulking to make them water-tight.

A letter from ex-Governor Boggs, of Missouri, now a resident of California, caused much stir in Independence to-day. It speaks of his poverty when he reached the Pacific, and of his present wealth, and advises certain of his relatives to drop everything and start for the land of gold. Three more mules, a recent purchase, were brought to camp this evening.

We are completely surrounded by camps of emigrants, and to-night another large party from Steubenville has been added.

THURSDAY, April 26th.—Edwin Bryant's company with one hundred and fifty pack-mules went past us this morning, all looking in fine trim.

This evening we drew lots for the choice of riding animals. Mr. Washington was fortunate in getting the first pick, and chose a large, fine, bay stallion. Following all others, by getting the last choice I had left to me a Mexican horse, not prepossessing in appearance, and of doubtful parts. The others got mules, some of them admirable for toughness; all of the low-built Spanish stock. Besides these, we have ten other Spanish mules for the wagons; all very superior animals.

FRIDAY, April 27th.—We spent several hours shelling corn in Mr. Rice's barn; a laborious operation. The mode was this: the edge of a shovel was so placed as to rest upon, and project over the side of a wooden box, while the sheller, sitting astride the handle, drew the ear of corn athwart the shovel's edge; the loosened grains falling into the box.

When this job was finished we harnessed the mules and made a trial trip. The animals were refractory, and not at all pleased with the restraint put upon them. Every one seemed to be suddenly possessed of a dozen legs, and each of these so set as to be able to strike simultaneously in all directions. They turned themselves constantly to all points of the compass, and had their inner and outer sides been reversed, I scarce think such changes would have excited surprise. Occasionally getting astride the traces, they kicked until we thought nothing would be left. Whilst some pulled, others backed. At times, poisoning on their back feet was a favorite attitude; and this they

varied by resting on those in front, while their hindermost heels gyrated in the air. A few miles down the road, and then back to camp, was sufficient exercise for the day; and we were by no means sure that the stubborn animals were brought into the least subjection. The one thing only of which we were positive was, that they accomplished every feat possible for mules to attempt. After this trial trip, some of the animals which had not been previously branded were put through this interesting operation. The unpleasant news reached us to-day, that a band of Indians had stampeded the mules of an emigrant party in the neighborhood of the Kansas River.

Our march will begin to-morrow. To-day ends the sixth week of camp life, attended much of the time with great discomfort, on account of inclement weather, incident to a spring having many of the characteristics of winter. We have lived on rough fare, and undergone many hardships, but all the while have enjoyed health beyond any experience in our past lives. All have gained in flesh; my own increase has been fifteen pounds; Mr. Scully has outgrown his clothes, and been compelled to trade portions of his wardrobe as best he could. I am happy to record that our spirits are in keeping with our bodies. We feel too, after this protracted encampment, as though Missouri had become our adopted State; and, indeed, its beautiful hills and valleys often remind us of our own loved Pennsylvania.

As the shadows of evening gather, while I sit in the tent door and watch the declining sun hovering above the horizon, bathed in a sea of its own effulgence, it seems to beckon us onward, beyond the vast prairies, beyond the rugged mountains, to what we are prone to imagine its resting place, the yet far off mighty West!

CHAPTER IV.

THE OVERLAND MARCH. FROM THE MISSOURI CAMP
TO THE KANSAS RIVER.

SATURDAY, April 28th. — The greeting of a bright sun this morning seemed to augur well for the commencement of our march; and throughout it continued a lovely day. Of course, there was unusual bustle in camp. The corn shelled yesterday had to be put into sacks, weighed, and placed in the wagons. Then the harnessing began, with experiences about similar to those of yesterday. Next we struck our tent, and wrapping the canvas around the poles, hung all into the wagon; then strapping the mess chest to the tail-board, and hanging the camp kettle below, we finally cracked whips and started.

The two wagons of Captain Pye's mess took the lead, getting off at ten o'clock. We got started about an hour later. Our mules bothered us greatly. When only a few rods from camp, they came to a dead halt in an insignificant ravine. Neither mild persuasion nor severe drubbing for a while had the effect of making them pull together. But when our patience had fairly oozed out, when our strength was about gone, and it seemed as if no more exertion could be put forth, they started off themselves, and walked

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WM. B. MCBRIDE.

From Photograph, 1867.

TRIALS.—PRAIRIE FLOWER.—BLUE RIVER. 51

quietly on as if nothing had happened. The mule is a singular animal; every spring it has to be broken to work, as if it never before had known what it was to be harnessed. It works hard through summer and fall, endures privations, both of food and water, as perhaps no other animal can, unless it be the camel, and will surmount any obstacle possible for its master—man. For travel on the plains it is naturally well adapted, while the horse is not.

Fresh troubles, constantly occurring, gave us little chance to observe the beauties of nature. But one flower in the vast plain did not fail to attract notice. Upon an eight-by-ten shanty on the roadside, which some enterprising individual had erected, and in letters large as the house itself, was chalked the one word: "WHISKY!"

At three o'clock we reached Blue River, a stream about ten yards wide, and three feet deep at the crossing. Its current was swift, with a gravelly bottom. On either side of it was a belt of timber, and quite a large number of emigrants were encamped in these woods. Mr. McBride, who has an eye for the beautiful, said that he noticed some handsome women in these camps; but long deprivation, it should be remembered, would have the effect of making anything in petticoats look charming. We had much difficulty in crossing Blue River, for its banks were deep and precipitous. Our mules at first refused to enter the water, and when they did so, were unwilling to leave it; so that we were obliged to borrow from

the neighboring camp a yoke of oxen, which pulled the wagons high up on dry land with wonderful ease. While fastening a chain from the ox-yoke to the axle-tree of our wagon, I became thoroughly drenched and chilled to the innermost bones.

At six o'clock we reached the frontier line of Missouri, which marks the separation between civilized and uncivilized life. Beyond were the vast plains as yet seldom visited and but little known to the white man,—the home of the Indian,—the land of the buffalo. Here alongside the farm of a Mr. Lipscomb we encamped, and by permission used an enclosure near his barn for confining our animals; the last opportunity of this kind it would be possible to enjoy.

It was arranged that one-half of the company should be on guard duty each night, and rest on the alternate night; that there should be four watches, of two hours each: the first beginning at eight o'clock, the next at ten, the third at midnight, and the last at two, ending at four o'clock, when commonly the march should be resumed. Those called for any particular watch, when next resuming guard duty, were to be advanced two hours later. Mr. Washington and myself volunteered for the last watch of this night, and consequently two nights later ours will become the first watch. Distance traveled to-day, twelve miles. Total from Independence, twenty miles.

SUNDAY, April 29th.—At two o'clock with Mr. Washington I mounted guard. The stars, keeping vigil over the camp, struggled with the darkness, and

the morning air was chilly, so that I was glad to hug the dying embers of the camp fire, as directed by my companion, whilst he started off to see if the mules in their enclosure were all right. He had not been gone long until, in a direction about opposite that towards which he started, I discovered by the dim lights hung up in the heavens a curious figure approaching where I stood, with what seemed like a tail eight or ten feet in length dragging behind it. Whether it were some wild beast, man or devil, I could not divine, all these were the suggestions of the moment. I had my musket beside me, but realized how utterly useless it was, being unloaded. Rushing to our wagon, I took down an axe, and with this hastened to meet the enemy; and when within slinging distance, raised this new weapon above my head, and by signs made known my desire that it should disclose its intentions. No answer was returned, so that I was sore bewildered; and it became painfully manifest that hesitation in the midst of this embarrassment might bring me into serious danger. Though I had not time to utter them I seemed to catch a hint from the words of Hamlet in the presence of his father's ghost.

"Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damn'd,
Bring with thee airs from heaven, or blasts from hell;
Be thy intents wicked, or charitable,
Thou com'st in such a questionable shape,
That I will speak to thee."

Once more twirling my battle-axe mid-air, I cried, "Speak;" when a faint voice said, "Colonel!" At once I knew it was Mr. Washington, and going

54 RAIN STORM.—NOTHING WHEN USED TO IT.

towards him saw that he was dragging a great fence rail, to replenish the fire. He explained that he was so overcome by fear, lest I should fling the axe at him, that at first he was unable to utter a word. The adventure caused considerable merriment in the morning when it became known through the camp.

At four o'clock the day began to break, and having prepared a pot of coffee for our mess, we called it first. Then arousing Stewart, he gave orders to begin the day's march.

We were soon in motion, continuing over the hard and smooth Santa Fe road. A heavy rain storm coming up, we were compelled for a time to halt; for it came in such gusts, that neither men nor animals could face it; the former took shelter on the lee side of the wagons, and the mules turned their tails to the severe elements. After the rain, the air became very chilly; and riding in wet clothing we were, of course, quite uncomfortable. This, however, was but the beginning of an experience to which in time we would become inured.

In the course of the morning, whilst riding beside Mr. Scully, we stopped to water our animals at a wayside pool. My horse, not satisfied to stand on the brink, walked into the water, and forthwith began to sink in mire. In my endeavor to extricate the animal I found it necessary to dismount, and in doing this, by some mischance, leaped into the midst of the pond. Scrambling out, I had considerable difficulty in getting the horse to follow; and when he

LAME MY HORSE.—CONSEQUENCES. 55

did so, discovered that he had lamed himself in his left thigh so that I could use him but little afterwards. This occurrence eventually led to the use of my own legs in crossing the continent, instead of those I had calculated upon, and I thus became an expert pedestrian ever after. My fellow travelers, however, were often glad to place their animals at my disposal, when wearied by long riding they sought relief in walking.

A solitary tree in the vast prairies, a well known landmark,—and with a name, too, "the lone elm,"—in the absence of everything else to relieve the weary monotony, was an object of considerable interest; and near to it, about noon, we halted for a short rest.

In the course of the day we passed numerous trains of emigrants, in many of which we observed females.

At five o'clock, having reached the farm of a civilized Shawnee Indian, named Rodgers, on a small stream called Bull Creek, we camped for the night. Mr. Rodgers and his three sons, young men, came out and greeted us in good English. Their dress was that of people in the settlements, and they were living in apparent comfort in a small, neat frame house with a vegetable garden about it.

Finding our wagon too heavily laden we concluded to unpack, and lighten it as much as possible. In so doing we were able to present the Indian family with a considerable amount of clothing, a fair sized library, two bushels of beans, two pigs of lead, half a keg of nails, implements of husbandry (a plow among

the number), and a lot of mechanical tools. We were joined this evening, according to a previous arrangement, by a party consisting of five men from Ohio, and one from the city of Boston. They had a wagon drawn by six mules, beside three riding animals. It was midnight when our repacking ended; and the night being clear, we slept in the open air. Distance, twenty-two miles.

MONDAY, April 30th.—It was six o'clock before we got started, although the camp had been roused two hours earlier.

Being detained somewhat after the train moved off, and not having watched its course, I missed the way after having started, and did not discover my mistake until I had gone fully two miles in a wrong direction. The road I had taken led into a wood, and eventually dwindled to a bridle path. Retracing my steps to Mr. Rodgers' house, he pointed out the right way. Reaching the main trail, no signs were noticeable of wagons having passed over it; but I persevered, feeling every assurance that I was going in the proper direction. The road being hard and in general smooth, the only marks observable were some ruts made during rain in the previous autumn. At length a trail, newly made, diverging from the main road, was seen. Dismounting and making close inspection I saw signs which convinced me that this trail was the proper one to follow, and in a little time came in sight of the wagons. On coming up to our party I found a discussion in progress as to whether in

leaving the Santa Fe road, as had been done for the purpose of entering the Oregon trail, they had made a proper divergence. Satisfied at length that they were going right, we continued to move onward. Thus it often happens when the trail is but poorly defined in consequence of emigrant parties pursuing different courses, while yet following in one general direction, that the traveler is frequently at a loss to know whether or not he is going aright. In general, there is a well beaten trail, but in places it may be overgrown with grass, and only by searching for and finding wheel tracks made in the present or former years, is there any indication of a course.

In my wanderings this morning an India rubber coat, strapped to my saddle, was lost. Leggings of the same material I had given away on the previous evening; thus my cares were gradually being reduced.

The beautiful undulations of the plains are like waves of the ocean, and while there is much monotony, there is nevertheless constant variety; for no two of the billows, whether of land or water, are precisely alike.

Some small streams with muddy banks gave us trouble, but we doctored them by cutting down bushes to cover the mire, and thus afforded the mules a foothold.

A keen, cutting wind to which we were exposed throughout the day, was quite disagreeable.

Towards evening we reached Wakarusa Creek, a stream with precipitous banks, in width about

thirty feet, and in depth three feet. In descending to the stream as many men as could be serviceable checked the motion of the wheels, holding them back, and it was thus that each wagon made a safe descent. But the main difficulty was in reaching the top of the bank opposite. By doubling teams, yelling at and whipping the mules, while many shoulders pushed at the wheels, the first wagon got across in safety. But an easier method was found for those that followed. On either bank of the stream were settlements of Shawnee Indians, living in small frame houses, and having an air of comfort about them. Their adjacent farms, too, were in good condition. One of the Indians, seeing our difficulty, came to our aid with a pair of fine oxen. At first we thought even these sturdy animals would not prove serviceable, for after getting a wagon half way up the bank it was found rolling back again, and but for timely scotching would have again been in the stream. Taking time to breathe for a fresh start, however, they went at it again, and in the next effort succeeded. Thus each wagon in turn was taken safely across.

Some Kaw Indians watched our operations at the ford, evidently with much interest. One of their number was an old chieftain, Kachinga, who spoke English fairly well. And I noticed also among them some of the party who a short time since paid us a visit while we lay encamped in

Missouri. They wore buckskin pants and moccasins, and had blankets closely drawn about them, and each carried a rusty rifle. Their hair was shaven close to their scalps, excepting a small tuft that was left about the crown of the head. Their faces were coated with vermilion, streaked with yellow and black paint, hideously savage and terrifying to behold, did we not know it was all moonshine, for they were harmless, beyond a natural disposition to pilfer whenever opportunity offered. They staid about our camp until near sundown, when we compelled them to take up their line of march.

We cast our nets into the Wakarusa, but caught no fish. After supper I bathed in the stream, and though exceedingly cold, I felt greatly refreshed after the day of toil and trouble.

Our camp was beautifully located in a little clearing in the woods, and we were girt about by the creek, which in its windings brought us within the radius of an almost complete circle. My horse was worse than useless to-day, for being quite lame, I was obliged to lead him.

This evening two gentlemen, Lieutenant Blakey and Mr. Samuel Handy (or "Handy Andy," as we afterwards called him,) rode into camp and passed the night with us. Their companions with two wagons are at some distance behind, but are expecting to be up with us in a few days, when by a previous arrangement they are to become part of our company.

One of our wagon wheel boxes having given trouble, we put it in order; then, having greased the axles, there was little delay in seeking for the night's rest. But before that luxury could be granted me two hours of guard duty had to be performed, lasting until ten o'clock. Distance, fourteen miles.

TUESDAY, May 1st.—At seven o'clock our march was resumed, and through a mistaken expectation that we would next encamp on the open plains we carried with us supplies of wood and water. The road was well beaten, but dusty. We passed eight wagons drawn by oxen, and one by mules. At three o'clock, reaching a small stream we encamped beside it. Wood for fuel was found at about four hundred yards distant. Cold winds prevailed through the day, and we were visited by a severe rain storm shortly after encamping. Distance, twenty-one miles.

WEDNESDAY, May 2d.—Starting shortly after six, an hour later a thunder storm with rain visited us, after which the sun came out bright and warm.

Our road continued over a plain destitute of trees, except occasionally an isolated clump distant from the trail. At noon we crossed a small stream; the banks, as usual, being steep and miry, there was no little difficulty in getting over it. Our wagon in particular, last in reaching the ford, had special trouble. Our driver, besides

being young, proved to be provokingly reckless. Stewart was careful to direct him how to proceed, but he gave little heed to the orders and went down the declivity whistling away as if on a dead level. When in the middle of the stream he suffered his team to halt, instead of pressing it on, and thus lost the force of the momentum gained, making the ascent of the opposite bank exceedingly difficult. Our mules having become somewhat manageable, this new balk was highly discouraging, and was wholly owing to Bagby's carelessness. Mr. Ray, or "Shorty Ray," as he is usually called—being low in stature, though uncommonly stout—in charge of one of Captain Pye's teams, and who as a driver in Doniphan's regiment is old in experience, came to our assistance, as he did on many occasions afterward. With Stewart on one side of the team and Ray on the other, and both up to their waists in water, lashing away with their great leathern whips and cursing as wagoners only can—a great necessity in times of difficulties, as they seem to think—and our own mess also in the stream with their shoulders to the wheels and yelling like madmen, the wheels began to move and presently the top of the bank was gained.

We met two wagons laden with furs from some trading post *en route* for the States.

When within a couple of miles of the Kansas River a half-breed Kaw Indian rode up and ad-

62 KANSAS RIVER CROSSING.—HORSE TRADING.

vised that we take the lower ferry crossing. Soon after another came with the advice that we take the upper ferry, adding that the last messenger was only a runner employed by the owner of the ferry he represented. Aware that it was of little consequence which should be chosen—while Kaw number two must have thought that we placed him in the same category in which he had put his brother Indian—we drove to the lower ferry. Another of these half-breeds drove up; like the others met he spoke in English, and dressed also in civilized garments. He rode a fine dun colored horse, for which I proposed a trade, and we made a temporary exchange for trial, agreeing to talk more about it in the morning.

Shortly after one o'clock we reached the ferry and encamped, concluding to remain there until morning. The Cincinnati company so handsomely equipped, of which I made previous mention, was in the act of crossing. Its members present a fine appearance in their blue uniforms, but only a few seem inclined to work. Their twelve wagons, built of iron, and expressly for the ferrings of rivers we were told, did not, from some cause, answer the purpose.

The Kansas at this point was over two hundred feet wide, with a swift current. A narrow belt of timber—oak, hickory and cotton-wood—skirts the stream on either side. We cast a net for fish, but caught only some useless gars. Some of our party

ENLARGE OUR PARTY.—CORN VS. GRASS. 63

bathed in the river, and found it quite enjoyable, as a stream so large afforded opportunities for swimming.

In the course of the day's march we observed, to the left of the road, a number of mound-like formations, possibly the work of a pre-historic race.

A mess of six men from New York, having a wagon drawn by six mules, united with us this evening. Our company now consists of twenty-four persons, and with others expected to join us, we will have in the neighborhood of forty.

Thus far the corn, upon which our mules have been fed, has been carried in a wagon brought for this purpose. What remains of this supply we distributed among our several wagons, as it is the intention of the teamster who brought it thus far, to return with his wagon to Westport, Mo.,* in the morning; and he will also carry with him letters which we have written to friends in the States. The grass crop is yet too scant to be of service; and although we have quite an amount of corn left, it must be fed sparingly. We slept in the open air, and but seldom after this pitched our tents. When it was wet, one or two usually found shelter in the wagon while the remainder huddled together as best they could sleep underneath. I was on guard to-night from twelve until two o'clock. It is a matter of frequent discussion, without definite conclusions being reached, as to which of the several

* From this then small village has grown Kansas City.

watches is the most trying. At the close of a long march, when, weary and worn, the mules having been picketed, supper over, and all are ready for rest in whatever spot it can be found, it is a painful thought to contemplate on the part of those who have yet to expend two more hours on guard duty. And yet to have one's sleep curtailed two hours at the latter part of the night to serve on the morning watch, is also very trying. But what shall we say of the intermediate watches—a few hours rest, then to be called up, and feeling that the remaining hours of sleep are by no means a compensation for being thus annoyed? The whole occasion for guard duty is the fear of trouble on the part of Indians, principally that of having the animals stolen. To be bereft of these we should be bereft indeed: it would be an unspeakable calamity—how would it be possible either to go forward or to return without them? None of the Indians thus far met would give us trouble perhaps; but the skulking devils who keep out of sight are those really to be afraid of. We have been traveling, and will for a time yet travel, through the country which the Pawnees inhabit, and we have them in dread. From information obtained, we learn that they are off on the war path against some tribe hostile to theirs; but still the utmost vigilance must be exercised for fear of their sudden return, and swooping down on us as so many vultures upon their natural prey. Distance, twenty miles. Total from Independence, ninety-seven miles.

CHAPTER V.

FROM KANSAS RIVER TO PLATTE RIVER.

THURSDAY, May 3d.—About eight o'clock the operation of ferrying the Kansas began. By means of a rope, one end of which was coiled about a tree, the wagons were let down the steep banks of the river, and placed in the boat. Two wagons and twelve mules were taken over at a time, the boat being propelled by poles. A Frenchman and his two sons, who are half-breed Kaws, own and work the ferry. Their charge is two dollars for each wagon, twenty-five cents for a mule, and ten cents for each man. Double teams were required to haul the wagons up the northern bank, and through the deep sand extending a quarter of a mile back from the river. It was noon before we finished crossing, and were in readiness to continue our march. The Indian with whom I had opened negotiations for a horse trade, declined to exchange his dun horse for my nag; but produced a fine looking, but small bay pony, and induced me to give him five dollars "to boot." I had not long to rue my bargain, for the animal was much too light for service.

On account of the corn which had to be carried, each man who had hitherto ridden, was obliged to walk, while packs were placed on their riding animals to aid in transporting the goods.

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NO NEW HORSE.—NO NEW WAYS.

We had intended to encamp three miles from our starting point, on Soldier Creek, but the wagoners in advance, observing some trees which did not seem far off, and might be near water, thought best not to halt, but to push forward. Much of the road was through deep sand, the wagons often sinking to their hubs, while for men and animals alike the march was excessively toilsome. My new horse annoyed me greatly; we apparently did not understand each other. Accustomed to Indian manners, he was unwilling to accommodate himself to a change of circumstances. Restive under the load packed on his back, he succeeded several times in throwing it to one side; and I was kept constantly restoring it to its proper position. It was impossible to lead him; for he would not follow me, and if I attempted to drive him from behind, he at once left the road. Tying him behind a wagon, I discovered he would not move his legs, but suffered himself to be dragged along, so that he was in danger of being strangled or otherwise injured. I ascertained at length that when I walked at his side, he went forward as well as I could desire. In this way he had been taught to go by his late master; this was Indian fashion.

The sun was fiercely hot, we had no water, and from heat and thirst all suffered greatly.

At five o'clock we came to a small tributary of the Kansas, and encamped. The trees which we had been attempting to reach, were appa-

POTTAWATOMIES.—AVERTED STAMPEDE. 67

rently as far off as when first seen; there were none near our camp, but we found some drift-wood on the side of the little stream, which answered for fuel. We were obliged to carry water in buckets for the mules, as the banks of the stream were so precipitous they could not be driven into it. This labor was excessively toilsome. Just after camping a band of Pottawatomie Indians on horseback came in sight, driving a herd of horses. Seeing their intention was to make a dash through our animals, and cause a stampede, we took measures to prevent this. A number of our men were sent out beyond the picket lines, and as the besiegers came up, their loose stock was sent flying in every conceivable direction over the plains. The Indians having now sufficient work in collecting their own affrighted animals, they gave us no further annoyance. We passed by a number of small houses to-day, inhabited by half-breeds; and along the road met several drunken Indians.

While taking our evening meal a score of Pottawatomies passed near us, but none stopped or showed signs of hostility.

Great flocks of pelicans flew above the river this evening, and Stewart shot one which he gave to a teamster, who made of the skin of it a soft seat for his saddle, keeping the feathered side out. Rain began to fall after dark, continuing through the night. Grass showed signs of improvement. Distance, thirteen miles.

FRIDAY, May 4th.—A cold, pitiless rain continuing to fall, we remained encamped until shortly after one o'clock, when our march was resumed. For a few miles the road was miry, fatiguing to man and beast, when we reached another stream, the crossing of which gave us no little trouble. On account of its steep banks great care had to be taken in descending. But a chief difficulty was in ascending the opposite bank, which was very miry, and ropes had to be used to pull the wagons to the top. One wagon became so completely mired down that its load had to be taken out and carried across. While assisting at this work I slipped and fell with what I was carrying, spraining an arm so severely that besides suffering great pain I was unfitted for further work. The stream beside which we encamped is variously called Deer and Deep Creek.

A fist fight, the first encounter of a disgraceful character, came off this evening between two members of Captain Karkuff's mess; one named Miller, a plain but manly Ohioan, the other named Clapp, an impertinent Yankee. The latter provoked the quarrel and was rewarded with rings around his eyes bearing a strong resemblance to ebony goggles.

An attempt to catch fish with a seine proved unsuccessful. An enterprising reporter, representing *The St. Louis Union* and *The Independence*

Expositor, was stationed at this point to make lists of the names of emigrants. Distance, four miles.

SATURDAY, May 5th.—We waited until after ten o'clock this morning for Lieutenant Blakey's company, consisting of ten men with two wagons and twenty-five mules to catch up to us. Upon their arrival it was concluded to effect a formal organization, when Stewart was unanimously elected Captain; and though this was from the outset a settled matter, he was very reluctant to accept the position. Lieutenant Blakey was chosen Captain of the Guard, and a committee consisting of Captains Pye, Karkuff and Washington were named to prepare articles for our government. They, however, never found time to act, and in fact there was no need of formulated rules.

About noon we assisted a little company, which became part of ourselves, in crossing the stream and climbing the steep bank. Those composing it were Captain Sweigler, Doctor Nelson, General Kane and a lad, brother of the doctor, all from St. Louis. They have one wagon and eight mules. Sweigler and Nelson served in the famous Doniphan regiment. By these accretions, as will have been observed, we have been gradually forming a reunion of many who belonged to an arm of the service which acquired unusual distinction during the late war. The march resumed, our way led over a low, flat, marshy ground, and twice we

were obliged to use spades in extricating wagons stalled in the road. We also encountered some small streams the crossing of which gave us trouble, at times making the use of ropes necessary.

A Catholic mission established among the Pottawatomies was passed, the houses belonging to it presenting appearances of comfort and neatness. Around one, a long, low structure used as a school house, a number of Indian lads were playing, much after the manner of our white boys in the States.

A sawmill was passed which had probably been erected for sawing the lumber used in the mission houses. Near the mill were a number of huts constructed of the boughs of trees and covered with bark. Most of them appeared to be deserted, but in some were seen males and females of the Pottawatomie tribe.

An Indian of fine appearance, well dressed and covered with a profusion of trinkets, bells and beads, rode with us for a few miles. His horse, of which he was exceedingly proud, was a fine looking animal, and he gave us frequent examples of its speed and of his own excellent horsemanship, by racing across the plains. At my prefer for a trade of steeds he was much amused, and shook his head quite knowingly.

Reaching a small stream about six o'clock, we encamped beside it, and as its banks were precipi-

tous we used our spades vigorously toward their improvement, to facilitate crossing in the morning. About dark we had a shower of rain.

I was on guard from ten o'clock until midnight. The night was intensely dark, the sky being clouded, and nothing was visible, even at a few paces distant. I went the dull rounds with a hand fixed upon a revolver, expecting an encounter which, in days to come, I might relate to my grandchildren; but no such good fortune favored me. Distance, fifteen miles.

SUNDAY, May 6th.—"Catch up," the usual signal given preparatory to starting, was sounded by the morning watch at five o'clock, and each man on leaving his tent took it up until the air rang with the sound.

Striking tents, folding and tying up blankets and robes, and hoaving these and the mess chest into the wagons occupied a portion of each mess, while others gathered in the picketed mules, harnessed and hitched them to the wagons, when on we moved.

An hour was consumed in crossing the little branch, and ropes were brought into use to aid the mules as they clambered up the miry banks.

Early in our march a cold rain began to fall, continuing for two hours and making the already muddy roads much worse.

After nine o'clock we reached Hurricane Creek, a swift-running stream about eight yards wide,

but with banks so graded as to present but few difficulties. It was skirted with a large and plentiful growth of timber, mostly oaks, and the acorns lying about them were enormously large, and except that they burned out quickly, answered fairly well for the bowls of tobacco pipes. Mistaking this stream for the Little Vermilion we filled our casks with water, as the guide book stated that none was to be had between that stream and the Big Blue River. As we proceeded we found there was no scarcity of springs or rivulets. About a mile beyond Hurricane Creek we encountered an extensive marshy plain and were obliged to double teams, taking over a few wagons at a time. In the course of the afternoon we passed the Cincinnati company, last seen at the Kansas River. At six o'clock we encamped near a fine spring surrounded by a clump of small trees. A gorgeous sunset greeted us this evening; perhaps nowhere else more frequently than on the plains can such exhibitions of nature's wondrous tinting be witnessed. Distance, sixteen miles.

MONDAY, May 7th.—Our march began at five o'clock over a rolling prairie barren of trees, except an occasional clump in some ravine or beside a water course. We crossed two small streams narrowly fringed with timber. While jogging along an antelope, within rifle range, bounded over the plains. Some of our hunters gave chase, but the nimble animal, without sign of discomposure, glided out of sight.

74 VOYAGEUR SUBLETTE.—VERMILION CREEK.

Just before camping, a wolf, on rising ground in advance of us, surveyed us composedly, and then gave an exhibition of its skill in departing.

Mr. Harper, of Independence, a member of Stewart's mess, by previous arrangement, reached camp this evening; not having been able to join us earlier. It was from him we learned the name of the creek where we camped at noon; he having obtained his information from the well known voyageur, Sublette,* whom he had met in the course of the day, and who is thoroughly conversant with the geography of the entire region west of civilization;—whose name, too, is attached to a "cut off" in the Rocky Mountains, which he discovered, and which we ought not to forget while memory lasts; as will hereafter be seen. The mistake which we had fallen into yesterday, supposing Hurricane Creek to be the Little Vermilion, had led us to consider the latter stream as the "Big Blue." Day warm. Night pleasant. A beautiful moon kept its silent vigils over us as we slept under the wide, blue canopy. Distance, twenty miles.

TUESDAY, May 8th.—From four o'clock until eleven our march was over a treeless prairie, when at the latter hour we struck Vermilion Creek, a stream forty feet in width, with pebbly bottom, beautifully clear, and skirted with timber.

* Captain Bonneville, in the account which he gives of his adventures in the Rocky Mountains, so far back as 1832, makes mention of Sublette as prominent then among the pioneers of the fur trade, and noted for many extraordinary exploits.

At nine o'clock, reaching Little Vermilion Creek, we crossed and halted for our morning meal.

This stream surpasses in beauty any thus far seen; its banks are skirted with timber of large growth, extending back from either side possibly one hundred yards. An undergrowth of bushes of various kinds in the woodlands, and numerous wild flowers, peeping up from the green sod, add to the charms of the landscape.

On resuming our march, we left behind a man from each mess to assist our New York friends in making repairs to their wagon, necessitated by an accident met with in crossing a small stream.

The grass along the route to-day was poorer than any seen for some days; Indians, or perhaps mischievous emigrants, having recently burned it off by setting fire to the old, dry, crisp grass, which burns readily, while the young tender crop is also licked up by the flames. The large caravans preceding us have also cropped it close, especially in the neighborhood of places suitable for camping; so that our animals fared poorly on the scanty pastures remaining. In passing through a marsh, our wagon stalled completely, and we were obliged to unpack most of the load, and carry it across; our backs and those of the mules performing the labor. This frequent portaging, it need scarce be said, is toilsome in the extreme. At seven we encamped near to a small sluggish stream. A few dead trees near the water furnished us with fuel.

INDIANS.—NO FISH.—ADDITIONS.—A GRAVE. 75

Its banks at the fording place were fearfully steep, and from twenty to thirty feet in depth. Each wagon had to be lowered with ropes, and with these and the mules combined dragged to the opposite bank. A short distance beyond we encamped one hour for our morning meal, turning the mules loose to graze at will on some good pasturage near by. While on herd guard a few Indians on an elevation were seen watching us, but on finding they were observed, stole away. In the Vermilion, as in two or three other of the larger streams of late, we cast our net for fish; and it seems curious that in these virgin waters we uniformly meet with no success. A bath in the Vermilion, during our rest, was enjoyed by many of the company. While encamped, four men from Michigan, with a wagon, two mules and four Canadian horses, came up and arranged to travel with us. Just before resuming our march, the wagons which had been disabled caught up, and we were in condition to move with our full train. Climbing the hills bordering the valley of the Vermilion, we were once more on the wide extended plains; a vast expanse of green beneath, measureless as the blue canopy overhead. On the brow of the hill was a lonely grave—intensely lonely; as much so as a grave in mid-ocean. A simple wooden cross on which was painted,—“JOHN MARSHALL, ST. LOUIS,”—marked the spot where was laid one who perhaps had been bright in

hopes as any of us when he began this journey. It's a cruel place to die; where no tender hand is nigh to smooth the dying man's pillow, or to place even a wild rose on his grave; and where perhaps is no kindred eye to moisten the sod above it with a tear.

Our driver, Joe Bagby, complained of sickness; and having with us a chest of medicines, we diagnosed his case, and as the doctors do, gave him a dose, which may make him better—or worse. Near the place where in the evening we took our second meal, were some conical sand hills. In a country so void of varying features, even a few sand hills seem worthy of note; and it can scarcely be conceived how greatly such objects, which under other circumstances would scarce attract observation, are here invested with so much interest.

After supper we pursued our way over some elevated ridges in darkness, for the sky was clouded, and we did not, as expected, have moonlight to aid and enliven our march. One portion of the company rode in advance, the remainder guarding the rear of the train. These last whiled away the tedium of the darkened hours by singing songs. Our program was as follows:

"Rockaway".....	Old Smith.
"Because 'tis in the papers".....	Gilbert.
"I cannot dance to-night".....	Harper.
"The Old Irish Gentleman".....	Scully.
"Ben Bolt".....	By the Journalist.
"Dearest Mae".....	By the same.
Chorus.....	By the company.

That "music hath charms" was manifest from the fact that before the concert was well under way, every man in the vanguard, including Jim Stewart, who also forsook his vigilance, came to the rear, leaving the forward wagons to the mercy of any Indians who might be prowling about. Possibly they thought there was no danger, if the poet in his estimate of the power of music was correct, as set forth in the continuance of the quotation alluded to,—“to soothe the savage breast.” Some Indians, indeed, were observed at a distance of a few miles, dancing about a fire kindled in the grass, which lighted up a broad expanse of the prairie. Great numbers of camps of emigrants were passed, where all in perfect quiet were resting for the night; and we rolled past unobserved, except by the guards on picket. Shortly after nine we encamped by a small stream, having a dense wood bordering it. Distance, twenty-five miles.

WEDNESDAY, May 9th.—A short way from camp this morning, we came to a wooden tombstone marking the grave of "Mrs. Sarah Keyes, aged 70, who died May 29th, 1846." Mr. Bryant mentions the death and burial of this lady in his work; and the little headstone served to determine our locality; for by it we knew we were nigh the Big Blue River. We found here also one of the kind of postoffices peculiar to the plains;—a stick driven into the ground, in the upper

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78 BIG BLUE RIVER.—NEWS FROM THE FRONT.

end of which, in a notch, communications are placed, intended for parties following. A letter in this postoffice was found addressed to Captain Pye. It was from Captain Paul, giving information that at this place his driver, John Fuller, had accidentally shot and killed himself whilst removing a gun from a wagon. The mule was the usual one—never yet patented, and open to all—the muzzle was towards him, and went off of itself.

A short march from camp brought us to the Big Blue River, a stream about fifty yards wide and three feet in depth, having a rapid current, and belted with fine timber. Its banks at the crossing being low, we got over without difficulty, and soon again reached the open plains. At the edge of the woods I discovered the camp of our friends, Stewart and Maury, who would have detained me to breakfast with them; a luxury seldom enjoyed by us. I was, however, obliged to move on, as our train runs too fast for laggards; although appetite and good company conspired against my decision. Upon a board nailed to a tree, we had the information that Paul, in the lead of the emigration, left here April 30th, and that Colonel Russell was here May 5th. From this it will be seen that Paul, although starting fourteen days in advance of us, was when here but nine days ahead. We, too, have been traveling leisurely; only in the past two days having begun to strike out seriously.

VAST TIDE OF EMIGRATION. 79

Rising from the valley of the Big Blue, our line of march was over high table lands, across which there was an extensive range for the eye. Far to our left we could see timber, but not even a stick could be found near the road. We gathered some small dried-up bushes here and there for fuel; had we been more provident, we might have brought from the Big Blue a plentiful supply. At ten o'clock we halted for our morning meal and a rest of two hours. Again in motion, we soon reached a point where the road, leading from St. Joseph, Missouri, joins the Oregon trail which we have been pursuing. From an elevation at the point of intersection we had an extensive view, and in looking behind over the road just traveled, or back over the St. Joseph road; or forward over that to be taken; for an indefinite number of miles, there seemed to be an unending stream of emigrant trains, whilst in the still farther distance along these lines could be seen great clouds of dust, indicating that yet others of these immense caravans were on the move. It was a sight which once seen can never be forgotten; it seemed as if the whole family of man had set its face westward. Our daily task for a time to come will be to get past those in advance of us, and to so travel that no trains shall overtake us; for in this way only can we hope properly to maintain our animals. The locusts of

Egypt could scarce be a greater scourge than these great caravans, as grass and whatever else is green must disappear before them.

We passed some men digging a grave to bury a comrade who had died of a fever. We meet frequently evidences of such sad scenes. Graves, sometimes marked with boards, rudely inscribed; sometimes by the skull of a buffalo, on which with red chalk, or other transitory substance, is made a simple inscription; often a mere stick performs a similar service, but more frequently only the turf elevated slightly above the vast surrounding plain is the evidence that there, taking its final rest, is the body of one like ourselves, and painfully reminding us, too, that it may be our lot to be laid in a similar grave, and that some passer by may remark,

"No useless coffin encompassed his breast."

Our driver being still unwell, Mr. Kincaid was in charge of the team. At dusk we made our night camp on a tributary of the Big Blue. Rain began falling soon after, continuing through the night. While on guard duty in the middle of the night I perceived great restlessness on the part of the mules. At times, suddenly starting or jumping, they loosened their picket pins which had to be staked again. A timid Yankee who thinks of nothing but Indians by day and dreams of them at night, became greatly excited, and at each disturbance made by the mules yelled loudly,

"Ho! Guard," "Ho! Guard." We ran each time without delay to save him from the deadly tomahawk, but only to learn what we already knew, of the uneasiness of the mules. His chief alarm seemed to be occasioned by the peculiar cocking of their ears, which always denotes the presence or approach of either Indians or wild animals. Travelers on the plains are familiar with this instinct on the part of these sagacious animals, and it has on many occasions been observed by us, and often long before coming in sight of either Indian, buffalo, or other animal, that the erected ears of the mules gave warning of what was likely to be in prospect. A coyote, or prairie wolf, was discovered to be the cause of the trouble on this occasion. One of the guard was about to fire his gun at the intruder, when Shorty Ray coming up, by his timely intervention prevented the camp from being thus uselessly aroused by the report. We succeeded in driving the little stranger away, but some guards following us were annoyed again, and no doubt by the same animal. The coyote is not dangerous except as a thief; in this respect its reputation is bad. A piece of bacon or a pair of old boots are temptations beyond the power of its resistance. Distance, twenty-six miles.

THURSDAY, May 10th.—Two small streams were crossed early this morning, and no more were seen through the day, but far distant in advance

82 CAUGHT NAPPING.—ANTELOPE.—POOL WATER.

of us, for most of the time, we could see the timber line that skirts Little Blue River. In the earlier hours of the day we passed many camps where no signs of stirring were yet visible, and no doubt morning naps were being enjoyed.

On a tree beside one of the streams crossed was a bulletin board, giving the names of many emigrants and the dates at which they had been at that ford.

An antelope came in sight, but our hunters were unable to get within shooting range of it.

We herded our mules from nine till noon on the open plains, at some distance from the trail, where good grass was found, and our morning meal was also taken during this interval. Water was obtained from a pool. These pools, we find, have often to be resorted to as the only means of supply. At times they are brackish, on account of decayed vegetable matter. Often there is no choice but to take them as we find them, but in general the water is sweet and palatable; less so, however, when, as is sometimes the case, a dead mule or ox is found beside them.

Guide books of the plains, while serviceable, are of little value in regard to water, grass and wood, and often as to distances. The conditions of one season vary from those of another, and, as in other economies, supply and demand must be considered. Other years are no criterion for the present, for never before has there been so large

CHANGE POSITIONS.—SERIOUS ACCIDENT. 83.

an emigration. When we read that in a certain locality grass will be found excellent, the best of reasons make it apparent that it will not be so found, too many having been informed of the fact.

Our New York friends had fresh trouble with their wagon and were compelled to again lie by to make repairs.

Shortly after four we encamped. A quarter of a mile distant was an excellent spring of clear, cold water, surrounded by a clump of trees, but in a deep ravine, and difficult of access. Being "hewer of wood and drawer of water," I found my task well nigh overpowering. After to-day there are to be some changes in the official positions in our mess. Mr. McBride, who has so gracefully swayed the baton of authority in culinary matters, lays it down and I am to take it up, while Mr. Scully takes my present position. Distance, twenty miles.

FRIDAY, May 11th.—The morning watch, on which I served, and whose hours expired at half-past two, called up the camp at that time. A half hour later, and quite a while before the gray streaks which precede the rising sun had begun to be painted above the eastern horizon, we were hurrying on. Just as we were setting out, Mr. Harper met with a painful accident which deprived him of the use of a hand during the remainder of the journey. In putting his

pistole into their holsters, through some careless handling one discharged its contents through the palm of his left hand. We dressed the wound as best we could until more skillful surgical attention can be secured.

In the course of the morning we crossed a small stream, and having the expectation of making our morning camp on the open plains, we carried from it a supply of wood and water.

The species of cactus called prickly pear is abundant along the line of our march, and the bleaching bones of buffalo are very plentiful. We seldom see a buffalo skull without finding it scribbled over with writing, and news in this way is frequently contributed by emigrants in advance to those following. The antlers of elks are likewise numerous and often of such height, the tips being stuck in the ground, that persons of ordinary stature can walk beneath them while in erect positions.

The sorrel horse obtained in a trade with an Indian eight days since, has been of little service to me, being too light. Moreover, as already explained, it cannot be led or driven, and I am compelled to walk at its side. I tied him behind the wagon to-day, when he endeavored to check its movements, but without success. Our driver, finding this impediment, cracked his whip and got his team into a trot, so that the horse soon discovered that the more he pulled, the less his efforts

availed. At times bracing his legs he was pulled along without moving a joint. Once having withdrawn attention from him, when I again looked I observed him being dragged with one side to the ground and all legs dangling about at will. I ran at once to his assistance, cut the lariat which held him, and hastily removing the saddle and bridle, which I threw into the wagon, gave him freedom to roam at pleasure. From that time forward I walked a greater part of the eighteen hundred miles which had to be traveled before reaching the Sacramento River.

Among many companies passed this day was one having thirty wagons drawn by oxen. About seven in the evening we struck the Little Blue River and encamped. I heard wolves howling hideously and concluded that my sorrel's death knell was being sounded, but this was a mistake for he was picked up and cared for by some one in the big ox train passed, and was taken to California.

The Little Blue is a beautiful stream twenty yards wide at this point, running swiftly over a gravelly bottom, its banks lined with timber. Distance, thirty-three miles.

SATURDAY, May 12th.—The incidents of this day were in general a repetition of those of yesterday. A similar early start, along the route many camps, buffalo skulls numerous and covered with bullets, and great patches of cacti many acres in extent.

Our route was along the Little Blue River which was in sight most of the day, and beside it our evening camp was made. Our usual mid-day rest of about three hours was on a high prairie fully half a mile from wood and water, which had to be carried that distance. Buffalo grass was plentiful. This is a kind which grows short and dense, and is accounted very nutritious. The mule, ox and bison are alike fond of it.

Great clouds of blinding, stifling dust filled the air, covering with a thick coat wagons, mules and men. Day pleasantly warm; night cold. Distance, twenty-five miles.

SUNDAY, May 13th.—A mantle of white frost covering the prairie, and thick coatings of ice in our water buckets were among the early observations of the morning.

Beginning our march at eight o'clock we traveled until seven in the evening, taking the usual noon-day rest. We passed many companies encamped for the day, and to me it was a constantly recurring regret that we too did not rest on the Sabbath. There were others who thought as I did, but it was felt to be entirely useless to attempt to change matters, and the way did not seem clear to act out the conviction that "it is better to obey God than man."

Among companies passed was one from Evansville, Indiana, and, singularly enough, connected with it was a former acquaintance with whom in

younger days I had sat in Sunday school, where we had been taught, "Remember the Sabbath day," etc. Here was a divergence—one ignoring, the other practicing these early teachings. My friend, who dropped in as we were breakfasting, had come via St. Joseph, and had later home news than we. From him I learned the death of a friend, Captain O. V. Israel, whom I had last seen on the morning we left Pittsburgh standing on the upper deck of the steamer Crittenden, which he commanded, as it passed us on the Ohio River. A recent graduate of West Point, in the full vigor of manhood, a life of usefulness seemed just opening to him which was thus suddenly terminated.

From our noon camp, where we left the valley of the Little Blue to strike directly for the Platte—over thirty miles distant—we carried a supply of both wood and water. Two antelopes, swifter than the wind, came near our train as if in defiance, and hurried from sight before any one could get within range of them. After encamping, high winds began to blow, the sky became clouded, and a storm of unusual violence commenced. The thunder was deafening, sounding like the discharge of many cannon, and accompanied by almost continuous flashes of lightning. In consequence of the great gusts of wind we had much difficulty in preparing our evening meal, and it was but a narrow escape we made of going supperless to bed.

The strife of the elements, including a deluging rain, formed the lullaby which soothed the camp into quiet slumbers. Distance, thirty miles.

MONDAY, May 14th.—So rarely has it happened, that any one in our train has enjoyed a morning meal before beginning a day's march, and seldom too, earlier than nine or ten o'clock; that the thought came to me on awaking this morning, to give an agreeable surprise to the members of my mess, by preparing for them an early breakfast. I soon discovered, however, that I had chosen an inauspicious morning for the purpose; for the wood which I thought had been properly cured for, was soaked by the night's rain; and it was at the expense of many matches, several wads of cotton from my coat, and burnt fingers besides, that my philanthropic intentions were carried out.

A word as to our meals: all are alike, or at least there is scarce any variety; and, as may have been observed, we rarely have above two in each day. The dishes comprise oatmeal mush, bacon-slices with pilot-bread fried in the fat, and coffee; these repeated *ad infinitum*. We had for a brief time sugar and molasses; but these were luxuries of which but a limited supply could be carried, and we soon ran out. Once, and sometimes twice a week, we have had bean-soup. Each dish named, is by every one highly relished, indeed eagerly so; and if towards any one in particular there is shown partiality, that one is bean-soup. This would be more frequently

served, but for the time required to boil it. On this account it has to be cooked by installments; one or more camp fires contributing towards the great end in view, as we travel. Meanwhile the kettle containing it is hung at the rear of the wagon, where of course it gets well peppered with dust. When this savory dish graces the bill of fare, none other is needed, and it alone is served. Verily, it must have been bean-soup for which Esau sold his birth-right; at least it would not be difficult to convince "our boys" that such was Jacob's mess of pottage.

The cold, damp, disagreeable morning did not suggest haste, and it was not until seven that we started. That peculiar phenomenon, the mirage, familiar to travelers on the plains, was seen by us this morning. The illusion was perfect; we saw, or rather thought we saw, a body of water resembling a lake, with trees about it. Its location was in the direction, and at a distance from us where it would have been quite agreeable to have made our mid-day camp. But as we advanced the attractive landscape faded from sight and our two hours' rest was taken on the open prairie. From this camp a view was had denoting what is to be an important diverging point in the trail—the great valley of the Platte River.

Antelopes were again seen frolicking as if in defiance of a chase, and no attempt was made to pursue them by any of our hunters. Late in the afternoon we struck the great, wild river at a point

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opposite Grand Island which was distant probably two hundred yards from the shore nearest us. The Platte was running high, quite muddy, and its current was swift. The banks confining it, composed of sandy loam, are constantly falling in, being washed away by the resistless current; and the stream is thus ever widening. The bottom lands, low and flat, showed signs of frequent inundations. Along the northern banks, and on Grand Island were trees of large growth, cottonwood, but none were growing on the southern side, along which lay our route.

Our evening camp was near some pools a half mile from the river. The water of these is clear and drinkable, while that of the river is totally unfit for use.

From the Missouri frontier to the Rocky Mountains, a distance of nearly seven hundred miles, there is a gradual but imperceptible climbing until an altitude of about six thousand feet above the level of the sea is obtained. About half of this distance we have already come, the remaining part lies entirely within this Platte valley. What has yet to be passed is, if possible, more monotonous than that traveled in the last sixteen days, a few prominent landmarks only in all this vast territory affording relief to the eye. Distance, sixteen miles; from Independence, three hundred and forty miles.

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CHAPTER VI.

FROM GRAND ISLAND, ON PLATTE RIVER,
TO FORT LARAMIE.

TUESDAY, May 15th.—Daybreak found us in motion. Within the next two hours we passed a number of camps where as yet no sign of stirring was visible. One company engaged in the preparation of breakfast had a name familiar to us, although most of its members were from Ohio. Its title was the "Iron City Rangers." A very live mess which seemed to take the lead in most matters, doubtless imposed the name. This was composed of our friends mentioned heretofore, Messrs. McKibben,* Myers, Mitchell, and the Kennedys, one of the latter being in command. Upon invitation I took breakfast with them, then bade them farewell, assured that we should not again meet until our marching days were over.

When opposite the head of Grand Island we came to a recently established military post called Fort Kearney, its commandant being Captain Bonneville, whose adventures in the Rocky Mountains nearly a score of years since, as written by Washington Irving,

* Hon. Joseph C. McKibben, among the earliest of the members of Congress from California.

Experiences of a Forty-Niner

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When th opposite the head of Grand Island we came to a recently established military post called Fort Kearney, its commandant being Captain Bonneville, whose adventures in the Rocky Mountains nearly a score of years since, as written by Washington Irving, have gigen him a wide celebrity. The fort buildings consisted of ten cabins built of adobes, (sun-dried bricks) comprising the barracks for men and officers, besides three large pounds in which were gathered the cavalry horses and cattle. The sutler's store was well stocked with goods. We laid in certain needed supplies, among other things some syrup, not absolutely necessary but toothsome; and a tin coffee pot, as the one in use had developed sieve-like qualities. A number of our men tarried to write letters, as there are occasional opportunities for forwarding them to the States. Some also obtained a meal which gave them much satisfaction, and these provoked considerable envy by telling of a young maid who waited on them, such sights being rare of late.

92

Whilst at the fort we learned that the Pawnees who inhabit this region, are at present settling some old scores with the Sioux and Cheyennes at some point to the northwest, and because of this circumstance we may escape the civilities or incivilities which otherwise they might bestow on us while passing through their territory. It may not be though quite civil on our part, while being as it were at the very home of the Pawnees, and presumably accepting their hospitalities, to speak disrespectfully of our supposed hosts,* [Ward McAllister might think differently] but we cannot refrain the utterance that they have acquired the reputation honestly--the only thing perhaps

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ever obtained by them in that mode--of being a cunning, cut-throat race of villains, with an endless propensity for stealing. We feel, moreover, that in the quasi possession as allies of the tribes which have for the time drawn them aside, we may esteem ourselves fortunate.

The river opposite the line of our march was about two miles in width. Since yesterday its current has much abated, the stream having quickly run out and become quite shallow, so that there would be little difficulty, we think, in crossing it, were it not for the shifting sands of its bed. Numerous islands, well wooded, were in sight through the day. At our noon camp, willows, found at intervals along the river banks, were used for fuel, but in the evening a better substitute was furnished in "buffalo chips," as they are commonly called--the dry excrement of the bison, which at certain points along the Platte is found in abundance. These kindle readily and make a fire of intense heat with but little smoke.

Three antelopes bounded across the trail, as we lay in camp at noon; coming near enough to be seen plainly, but not lingering to be shot at. As we proceed, getting more and more in advance of emigrant trains, we find better pasturage for the mules. During the mid-day rest and at each evening camp, prior to the hour of setting guard (eight o'clock), when the mules are usually picketed, we herd them,

- 94 i. e. let them run at will, stationing pickets at outlying points, to prevent them from wandering to too great a distance.

High winds this evening were followed by rain. Distance, twenty-five miles.

Wednesday, May 17th.—A drizzling rain, which began in the night, commenced again soon after we had started, but by nine o'clock it began to fall heavily, and orders were given to encamp for the day; not because of discomfort suffered by the men, but on account of the injury the mules might sustain in a constant pull over miry roads. Stewart's concern is always for the mules—he wastes no thought on the men. Because of the hard, driving rain, we were unable to build fires in the usual way to cook breakfast, and for the first and only time set up in our tent a small sheet-iron stove, having a pipe which projected through the opening in front. This, however, was not a success, for the draught was hindered by the blasts of winds without; and whilst we had little heat, there was an overpowering amount of smoke, and all were well nigh suffocated before the coffee pot began to boil. Accustomed to eating uncooked bacon, during the usual morning marches made prior to breakfasting, we felt no great disappointment that on this occasion we could not wait to fry pork; as with slices of the raw article and hard biscuit, aided by generous appetites, we made a hearty meal.

- 95 In visiting from tent to tent, in social intercourse, and in smoking our pipes, the long, rainy day was passed. Just before camping, a company of men, with a wagon and a drove of California horses, some of them carrying packs, met us. They had with them mails from California and Salt Lake, having left the Mormon settlement on April 17th. In crossing the Utah mountains, they had to cut their way through snow, in places fifteen feet deep. Their accounts in reference to gold discoveries in California, were very extravagant.

A company of traders and trappers, recently from Fort Laramie, en route for Missouri, encamped near us. Their wagons were heavily laden with buffalo robes. Some of our party, visiting them, were hospitably entertained, being treated to buffalo meat and venison. It was still raining when we returned for the night. Distance, ten miles.

- 96 Thursday, May 17th.—Our road was miry through the greater part of the day, and crossed by frequent gullies in which small streams, formed by the recent rain, found their way to the river. Our course, in general, lay along the sand bluffs which hem in the valley; the Platte being about two miles off. Rain continued to fall at intervals, and at our morning camp we were nearly deluged while preparing breakfast. While thus engaged, two men approached who were pursuing their journey to California, alone and on foot. Their tent was an umbrella; and in packs borne on their backs, they carried provisions to last them about thirty days, expecting to get fresh supplies at forts on the way. They started from some point on the Missouri River, and thus far have passed all trains they came in sight of. We permitted them to fry bacon at our fire, and furnished them coffee to drink, for which they were very thankful.

We passed a prairie dog village, consisting of hundreds of conical shaped mounds, about two feet high. No dogs were visible; inclement weather probably kept them within doors.

To-day, for the first time, we came in sight of buffalo. A herd of immense size was seen on the northern side of the Platte. We watched some men belonging to an emigrant train, who attempted to ford the river in pursuit of this large game. All, however, were forced to return, for the animals they rode were unable to keep their feet in the uncertain sands forming the bed of the stream. An hour or so later, while riding in advance of the train, some of our hunters gave chase to three buffalo, but were unable to overtake them.

A large company, having the name "St. Louis Telegraph Co. painted on their wagon covers, passed us whilst nooning, but we encamped beyond them at night. Distance, twenty-five miles.

97 Friday, May 18th.—Buffale in astonishingly vast numbers yet inhabit this region, but the destruction in constant practice, by hunters who kill them almost exclusively for their skins, must before many years make them very scarce. Each day we see evidences of this shameful waste in the great quantities of bleaching bones which mark this valley.

Occasionally a few birds are seen, but we do not wonder at their scarcity in the absence of trees. To-day we passed some small clumps of trees in dry ravines; the first met with on this side of the river. And a conspicuous feature in the landscape consisted of some sand hills on our left, worn into many fantastic shapes; a moderate imagination only was needed to trace resemblances to castles, temples and towers.

A party of traders and trappers, with four wagons laden with furs, passed us, en route to the States. Numbers of emigrant parties were passed in the course of the day, mostly small; one, however, had about twenty wagons drawn by oxen. The St. Louis company, mentioned yesterday, went past us at noon, but we again left it behind at night.

Rain fell again in the night. Distance, twenty-five miles.

Saturday, May 19th.—Three hours of heavy rain, accompanied by thunder, was an incident of the morning march; and a similar storm, but of less duration, greeted us in the afternoon. Our mid-day halt was opposite the junction of the North and South Platte Rivers.

98 The observations of the day included great patches of cacti, numerous prairie dog villages, several emigrant trains which were passed, and a few fleet-footed antelopes that came in sight. Mr. Clarke, of Blakey's mess, had the good fortune to be the first to shoot down an antelope, which he divided around; our mess sharing in one of the hind quarters. This was a treat greatly enjoyed, after the long continued use of bacon. Ours was the only camp fire at night; we having picked up sundry sticks along the road which served for fuel, while others, trusting to chance, were unable to find anything near camp which could be made to answer. It was amusing to see the men gather about the fire, each with a slice of vension on the end of a stick, waiting his turn to toast it in the blaze or to cook it in the warm ashes. No jelly was required to make the savory meat palatable, prepared in this rude but unapproachable style of cuisine. High winds blew through the night. Distance, twenty-five miles.

Sunday, May 20th.—We encountered much mud in our march this morning, but in the afternoon a discomfort of different character met us, when clouds of sand, driven by a strong wind, assailed us.

I found an Indian scalp to-day, a Sioux treasure perhaps, as we are within their territory; my difficulty is to know what to do with such a prize; and if found in possession of it, my dilemma might be greater.

99 Colonel Russell's train, ahead of us, was in sight; and a number of our friends, belonging to it, tarried behind to have a talk with us. Among emigrants passed were two families—men, women and children—who had belonged to Russell's company. They complained that he charged them five dollars a head as guide, and had abandoned them for not being able to keep up with his train; but without returning the money they had given. His assumption of ability to act as a guide was based, it is said, on the experience of a single previous journey, without any special qualifications for the position so far as could be ascertained.

Night cold. Distance, twenty-five miles.

Monday, May 21st.--Through a misapprehension of facts, we were allowed the unusual privilege of breakfasting before beginning the day's labors. Supposing that we were near the ford of the South Platte, where a crossing is made in order to reach the North branch, which thenceforward is followed; and with a view to allow Russell's train in advance to get over before we reached it, was occasion of our delay. We were, however, further from the ford than had been thought, and before reaching it, a considerable journey awaited us. The road was in many places miry, occasioning much trouble and delay. Of late we have encountered many large tracts covered with a white efflorescence as of saleratus, which, when stirred by winds, as was the case to-day, occasions

100 much painfulness in the regions of the eyes and nostrils. The waters of pools in the neighborhood of these tracts are found to be strongly alkaline.

Among emigrant trains passed was one, some members of which were anxious to unite with us. Our train, however, was already sufficiently large; and experience has taught us that accidents are not infrequent, and when one occurs to a wagon, it often occasions the deteatation of all.

A cold rain, but fortunately of brief duration, fell on us after leaving the noon camp. While riding along the bank of the river, a singular burying place was observed. Deposited in the topmost branches of a tree on an island, wrapped in blankets, and fastened to a piece of bark, was the body of a defunct Indian. As trees are scarce in this country, it must not be supposed that they form the only grave yards of the red men; it is rather to be conjectured that renowned warriors only are thus hung up to dry. And could there be a higher token of regard for departed worth, in allotting such rare cemeteries for the last resting place of the brave! It is thus, too, that many benevolent whites would elevate the entire Indian race. Requiescat in pace.

Some squaws, belonging to the Sioux tribe, rode towards us, and saluted us with "How do? how do?" I was riding Mr. Scully's mule, a fat, hearty beast, and not fond of fast trotting. When the squaws came up, I traded some tin trumpets
101 with them for moccasins; after which the ladies desired me to run a race; and one at either side of my mule, switched him until we were off on quite a brisk run. For a mile or so we kept this up, to the great amusement of our company; but my mule was no match for their ponies in speed, and they tired of the race. At four o'clock we reached the ford of the South Platte; and around it were gathered some two or three hundred Sioux Indians--old men, women and children--the young warriors, as we had learned at Fort Kearney, being off on the war path after the Pawnees. They have two villages not far distant; having been attracted hither by the emigrants, whom they expected to find at the crossing.

On arriving at the ford, Colonel Russell, who was engaged in getting his company across, waited upon Stewart, and suggested that he postpone fording until the following morning; promising to lend him the assistance of a French guide, who would lead him safely over the hills to the fork of the North Platte. He mentioned the advantage we would have in using the graded cuts in the banks on either side of the river, then being used by his train. Russell, moreover, warned him of the danger, as it was late, of getting part of his company over, and leaving the rest to the mercy of the Indians; or, in case the fording was continued after night-fall, it might be attended with serious consequences. He did not forget to add

102 that he was an old, experienced pioneer, and had been across the plains before! Stewart thanked him especially for the proffer of the "French guide," (?) but recklessly and resolutely began preparations for fording forthwith, setting a number of men at work to cut a new descending passage down the steep banks of the stream.

The river, fortunately, was not too high for easy fording, or to necessitate

the calking of wagons for ferrying across; but, on account of its deep, shifting sands, pulling heavily laden wagons over would be exceedingly difficult, if not impossible. We accordingly emptied large portions of the load of each wagon, to be packed across on the backs of mules; meanwhile setting a watch over the stuff while the fording was in process. The river at this point was about three-fourths of a mile in width, and the forward teamsters found it difficult to get their mules to enter the water; neither whipping, coaxing, nor cursing, all freely employed, seemed of avail. At length a horse was ridden across in plain view of the mules, and when it reached the opposite bank, and stood on solid ground, the force of so good an example was entirely satisfactory, and the teams moved forward without further delay. Some mules were hard to manage, on account of uncertain footing in the bed of the river, and they plunged wildly about, breaking their harness under circumstances where repair was next to impossible; but in general they behaved well; and it was a grand sight to watch the long caravan of wagons with their white canvas coverings, and the mules up to their bellies moving across the wide expanse of water. The river bed was very irregular, and at times the wagons sank in deep holes, and again rose almost to the surface of the water on sand bars.

In addition to viewing the interesting operation of fording, and watching the goods scattered over the banks, it fell to my lot to have other matters to engage my attention. The Indians were quite inquisitive; at first they crowded about the wagons, lifting the covers, and peeping into the interior; and afterwards showed inclinations to inspect the contents of bags, boxes and barrels lying about. We frowned, shook our fists, and showed other signs of displeasure, but took care not to excite hostility by too much of an exhibition of anger. To manifest our kind regard for them, as they pressed about us, we shook hands with the entire crowd, men, women and children. Our mess had a bag filled with tin horns, beads, mirrors, jaws-harps, harmonicums and trinkets innumerable, which we desired to use on proper occasions, should such arise. It occurred to me that now was the auspicious moment, so I opened the bag, and at first gave instruction in instrumental music, which occasioned a measure of delight I have rarely seen equaled. I hope I may be pardoned when

I state that there was as much real pleasure excited in the breasts of these savages, as is commonly experienced in fashionable audiences when applauding scientific music, neither understood nor appreciated; and let me add, the joy on this occasion had but one parallel, the genuine rapture of the same audiences to which I have referred, when "Home, Sweet Home" is sung by a Jenny Lind, or "Way Down upon the Swanee River" is warbled by a Christine Nilsson. After instruction by example, in tooting on the horns, and moving the other musical toys about my lips, I held them to the mouths of several of the old chiefs, who gathered close about me, and their enthusiasm was unbounded when they saw that they too, could occasion such exquisite harmonies to float on the air. They danced about in great glee, and in knots of ten or a dozen here and there, leaped as though skilled in terpsichorean art. Discovering that I was anxious to procure some moccasins, they showered them at my feet as fast as I could pick them up, and to stimulate them in this good work, I distributed the horns and other tooting instruments among them, and very soon the whole tribe was in a perfect uproar: while the blast of the larger trumpets and the squeak of the smaller ones, almost made me repent of my folly. One old chap, who had no moccasins to give, snatched some from the apron of a squaw, and threw them to me: and I only kept peace in the family, by giving her a necklace of beads and some other gewgaws; for the savage female has instincts similar to some of the more favored of her sex. But what shall I say of the musical enthusiasm of the old chief, who was ripe for such sacrifices; not unwilling that all of his wife's people should go barefooted, if by any means it were possible, that he be allowed full scope to gratify his aesthetic taste, one marked with evidences of high refinement. Can enthusiasm in art go farther, or where is a higher appreciation of it to be found?

A rather pleasing looking squaw, not much, if any, beyond her twentieth year, begged for something, which I soon discovered was coffee. Our supply was ample, yet to be economized, but I could not deny her what she could hold in the pleading palms of

her outstretched hands. Still I wondered what she could know of this beverage, or of the art of preparing it; but that was none of my concern when something akin to beauty was the suitor.

I observed a number of papooses riding about in baskets made of willows, to which long poles for shafts were attached, and in which dogs were harnessed to drag them about. These dogs were large, black and wooly, resembling those of New Foundland.

106 The Sioux do not appear to be slaves of fashion; i. e., they are not confined to any particular style of dress; indeed, there is much independence, and variety without limit; so that a description of their costume would be difficult to attempt. Buckskin is used largely by both sexes; and shawls of cotton and wool, of bright colors, are alike worn by men and women. The better dressed of the men use buckskins only, from head to foot; trimmed with beads and fringes. Nearly all have headgear of feathers, dyed with fantastic colors; while their faces are smeared or streaked with black, red and yellow paint. The women are usually worse clad than the men, and I suspect they use the cast-off clothing of their lords. And if there is a difference, they are less cleanly than the men. As is customary elsewhere, all drudgery is performed by them; in fact, the men devolve all labor upon the women. When the tribe travels, the men ride, the females are allowed the privilege of walking; and when a halt is made, they are so far indulged as to have committed to them the exclusive care of the horses. They are not esteemed in these parts as the "better half of creation," though, doubtless, their "protectors" rate them as useful appendages. Many of the men had guns, few of which were fit for use, and they had no ammunition. Most of them, however, had bows and arrows which they could handle with skill. Their arrows were frequently carried in quivers made of skins, handsomely worked with beads.

107 Before sunset our wagons were all across, and many of the mules were brought back to carry over the goods piled upon the river bank. I happened to be among the last to leave, and started with a load strapped to my shoulders, and leading a mule heavily packed. Some of Russell's men were yet behind. I found the water cold, and at times a sickening sensation thrilled through me, especially when, as occurred twice or thrice, I sank almost to my armpits in some of the holes. At times the sand sank quickly under my feet, and I was seriously bothered to keep erect. Thus was the Red Sea of our exodus crossed, and in safety we encamped a short distance from the river.

After putting on dry clothes, I prepared the evening meal, using for fuel bois de vache, which was abundant. Mr. Washington traded a horse he had been riding, for a mule belonging to an Indian.

During the night there was a heavy fall of rain. Distance, fifteen miles.

Tuesday, May 22d.—While Colonel Russell and his "French guide" were enjoying their morning nap, perhaps not dreaming of our temerity in crossing over to the North Platte unaided, we were moving briskly on. The ascent of the hills between the two streams was difficult, on account of the grade and also of the sand through which we had to pass, and after crossing the ridge the descent was found sufficiently steep to be perilous. The journey, however, was accomplished without accident.

108 While on the top of the ridge, resting and looking below toward the South Platte valley, we saw a number of buffalo quietly grazing, at a distance of probably ten or a dozen miles.

At the foot of the declivity toward the North branch is Ash Hollow, and within it is a forest of large trees. Here we were almost overpowered by swarms of gnats.

The heat, too, was oppressive, for the ravine was so shut in as to exclude the free circulation of air to be found outside. Tying handkerchiefs over our heads to protect ourselves from the merciless insects, we were well nigh suffocated for want of air. We suffered too from thirst, but found relief on coming to a stream of deliciously cool water, thus far an exceeding rarity.

Emerging from Ash Hollow our route lay along the North Platte. The features of the country surrounding were similar and equally monotonous to those on the branch from which we came.

We again met one of the pedestrians mentioned a few days since. The partnership had been dissolved, the other member having attached himself to some train. This one, named Pink, is determined to proceed alone.

At our evening camp we were visited by a terrific storm of thunder and lightning, followed by a deluging rain which continued through the night. Distance, twenty-eight miles.

Wednesday, May 23d.—Air, earth and sky seemed against us. It was cold; black, angry clouds

109 were over us; rain fell through most of the day and hail in the earlier hours. The road at times was sandy, at others miry, so that our progress was slow.

A great herd of buffalo was in sight on the north side of the river.

Stewart shot a black-tailed deer and distributed the meat among the several messes. Distance, fifteen miles.

Thursday, May 24th.—A cold, drenching rain again poured upon us through the greater part of the day, so that we made short hours and little progress, starting at six and camping at three, with the usual halt at mid-day.

Mud, sand, and in places gravel, were the main difficulties encountered, and there was fear that the mules would become chafed by the rubbing of wet harness.

The rude elements were sufficiently indulgent to allow us, whilst moving, to enjoy some of the good things of life—chief among them bean soup! Preparations had been in progress for a day or two past, and the culminating point was nearly reached when the camp kettle was hung over the fire for the final boil of the beans. This was more than an ordinary occasion, for parts of the deer shot by Stewart were to be cooked in the soup. It is curious how such an event become heralded through camp where no gong or bell is

110 rung. But when it does happen it has uniformly been the case that just as the pot is being lifted and the cook looks about to see where to place it, he sees coming towards him, armed with tin cups and spoons, Jim Stewart, Shorty Ray, Sweigler, Webb and others I might mention—all self-invited, but none the less welcome—duly prepared to join us in partaking of what is universally regarded as the one grand entertainment of camp life—bean soup!

Dinner over, and our little stock of wood exhausted, when we again started we kept a sharp lookout for a new supply, but none was found. It was a dreary prospect when, in the middle of the afternoon we encamped with rain falling again and rapidly, with no fires to cook a meal or to warm ourselves. Some trees were observed at a distance, greater than was calculated, for in the strait in which we were we started for them, only to ascertain after a long tramp that they were much too far away. In a ravine, however, which after melting snows in the spring-time becomes the bed of a stream, we found some logs, to all appearances so water soaked that it seemed impossible they could burn. In our need, however, we concluded to make a trial of these,

111 in the hope that we might not be compelled to go supperless and shivering with cold to bed. Accordingly we mounted them on our shoulders and started to return. When nearing camp our driver, Bagby, who is ever fond of self-saving methods, was seen approaching with a similar log, not on his shoulders, but tied to the tail of a mule, which it dragged, as it seemed, with ease. On chopping the logs and setting fire to them, it was a surprise for which we were grateful, to find not only that they burned, but in a way we had seldom seen equaled. There was a sharp cracking and the flying of sparks in all directions, by which we were soon made acquainted with the fact that the fuel was pitch pine.

On the north side of the river to-day we again saw an immense herd of buffalo, numbering perhaps a thousand or more. Knowing the emigrants' trail, doubtless as well as we, their instinct had taught them to avoid it; for we meet none southward of the river, and this is an indication that if we leave them alone, they will leave us alone.

"Old" Smith and Mr. Scully, who were off scouring among the sand hills all day in quest of game, brought to camp this evening a deer shot by the former; an event giving promise of continued feasting on good things.

Rain ceased before night-fall, and the opportunity was generally embraced of drying wet clothing before retiring for the night. Distance, twelve miles.

112 Friday, May 25th.—Soon after leaving camp, Court-house rock was in sight, at a distance of about thirty miles, and from our noon camp at a similar distance, another notable landmark, Chimney rock, was seen.

We met a man named Palliday, traveling with a one-horse, rudely constructed wagon. He lives at Scott's bluffs, about sixty miles further up the valley, where besides his own are two other cabins inhabited by men of similarly retired habits. It seems hard to conceive of any one from choice living so far remote from civilization. Even the Indian is driven hither by the encroachment of the whites; but his nature, taste and mode of life make this a fitting abode for him, as it is also for the buffalo or deer. Palliday is en route for the South Platte, for some trading operation with the Indians.

Rain again fell in the afternoon, but fortunately did not continue long. Towards evening, when about opposite Court-house rock, a number of us, with a view of getting near to it for close inspection, rode in that direction for a half hour or so. Finding that it was still ten or a dozen miles, and perhaps further off, we abandoned the attempt, contenting ourselves with that play of imagination by no means difficult, which makes it seem like some great architectural structure—a palace peradventure, dwelt in of old by the Incas who, possibly long before the red man, held sway over these illimitable plains.

113 A painful accident, and one which greatly alarmed us, befell Mr. McBride to-day. He had been riding in the wagon, and while it was in motion, had attempted to get down from it, when the tail of an army coat, which he wore, caught in the wheel, dragging him under while it passed over his left leg, near the knee. But for his presence of mind in rolling aside, he might have been crushed to death under the hind wheels. Doctor Cook, belonging to our train, examined the bruise, and relieved us greatly when he announced that no bones were broken. It will, however, be several weeks before he can leave the wagon, which is to be his hospital.

Messrs. Washington and Clarke had an animated chase after an antelope, in full sight of the train. A shot from the rifle of the latter at length secured the prize, which was borne in triumph to camp. Our mess on all such occasions fares sumptuously, usually being favored with the choicer parts of any game killed. Indeed, on all oc-

casions we are the constant recipients of much kindness; and if ever we get in a tight place by reason of any accident, there are scores of friends ready to lend us a helping hand. Youth and inexperience may have won for us this sympathy; but whatever the cause, we have awakened a chord in the breasts of the old pioneers about us that never ceases to vibrate. A return we feel able to make, seems to be highly appreciated. Always having good camp
 114 fires, when it is possible to have them, others less active in this way, gather around ours to indulge in a chat, or join in a song. On the part of no one is there backwardness in helping himself freely from our ample pot of steaming coffee; while our bag of cut and dry tobacco is ever esteemed as public property. In fact, it seems to be generally considered that "the latch string is out."

After dark, the phenomenon Will of the Wisp was observed; it might readily be mistaken for a lantern bobbing about. Distance, twenty-eight miles.

Saturday, May 26th.—A heavy frost lay on the ground this morning. The night had been cold, and in spite of warm wraps we were uncomfortable.

Chimney rock, since we first saw it, has loomed up steadily, reminding us of pictures often seen of the great Egyptian obelisks, towering high above the vast deserts which surround them. A number of us, riding in advance of the train, sought to get a near view of it; but as all prominent objects on the plains are vastly more distant than they at first seem, we were longer reaching it than we had expected to be. The shaft itself, to the foot of which we climbed, springs from a great isolated mass of ill-shaped sand rocks, of which it also is composed, and stood perhaps sixty feet above us. Its total elevation above the surrounding plains was in the neighborhood of two hundred feet.

115 The winds and rains of centuries are the sculptors which have hewn this great column; and Titans of nature though they be, in the selection of a material for showing their skill in art, they have been immeasurably behind Tothmes or Rameses, whose blocks of granite well nigh mark the beginnings of time, and may yet endure through ages to come, when amid the shifting sands along the Platte nothing shall remain to mark the site of Chimney rock.

It has been stated by some travelers, that within their recollection Chimney rock was twice the height it now is, and by ~~te~~ others that it has been double its present breadth. If ere long we should hear that it had suddenly toppled from its base, we should not feel like questioning either statement, particularly the latter; for we noticed signs that strongly indicated rapid disintegration; a multitude of names having been carved upon its several sides by those who in this way seek for immortality.

Scott's bluffs, the third and last of the prominent landmarks to be seen on the Platte, were in sight to-day, about twenty miles in advance of us.

Much of our road lay through deep sands, making travel difficult; the wagon wheels often sinking to the hubs.

The sand hills on our left for several miles, were worn into grotesque shapes, and there were many crevices hollowed out by birds, in which they built their nests.

116 A prairie dog village was passed, and a number of owls were on guard beside the mounds where the dogs burrow, but none of the latter were seen. Nor did we see rattlesnakes, said to be also embraced in the combination constituting the triple tenantry of these under-ground habitations.

A number of emigrant trains were passed, among them one called the Platte City Company, commanded by Colonel Ransom; from whom we learned of a hailstorm of considerable violence, encountered on Tuesday last, ten or twelve miles west of Ash Hollow. Their wagon covers and tents had been riddled by hailstones, some of which were of extraordinary size, weighing as much as eight and nine ounces each. The cattle of some emigrant parties were so badly frightened that they ran in various directions for many miles from their owners. When passing the locality where this occurred, we had noticed the ground torn up, and in places forming large cavities, but were unable to conjecture the cause until learning these facts. We are also able to account for the cold weather which followed. The storm we had experienced in the evening referred to, had not been accompanied by hail.

"Old" Smith was off on a hunt to-day, and as trophies of the chase brought to camp two antelopes. Distance, twenty-seven miles.

117 Sunday, May 27th.—In order to get well in advance of the numerous companies in our neighborhood, that we might secure pasturage not to be shared among so many animals, our camp was called up at half past three, and soon after we were moving forward.

When the sun was well up, we were opposite the picturesque sand cliffs, Scott's Bluffs, which closely hem in the river, but our trail was two or three miles distant from them.

A small spring of cool water which we passed afforded us a refreshing draught, the more so, as in these arid wastes we seldom have opportunity for such enjoyment.

Near to our noon camp was a blacksmith shop, kept by a man named Bordeau, who to supplement the income from the smithy, sold whiskey, at the rate of one dollar per pint.

118 From the summit of a ridge crossed, we caught a first glimpse of the Rocky Mountains:—Laramie's peak and others, distant a hundred or more miles, were distinctly in sight. Mr. Bryant, in his work, states that from this point he "thought he could see the Wind River Mountains, about four hundred miles distant," (!). There can be no doubt whatever as to this; for he also mentions the cold spring, near the summit, of which I have spoken; and in this rarefied region, where the atmosphere is so remarkably pure; after a pull or two at his flask, refilled possibly at the smith's shop—to take off the cold effects of the spring water, it might be quite possible to imagine mountains in sight, even at a distance more remote: and especially as "their summits appeared like small clouds resting upon the horizon." "How very like a whale," said old Polonius, when somewhat fuddled. It was nigh three hundred miles further on that our own first glimpse of the mountains in question was obtained, agreeing too with the record of Fremont; but neither the explorer, nor ourselves perhaps, enjoyed the help to vision mentioned.

Our night camp was at Horse Creek, an affluent of the Platte. Distance, twenty-four miles.

Monday, May 28th.—On leaving our tents we found the earth robed in a vesture of frost, and when the sun arose we trod upon a carpet glistening as with myriads of diamonds.

Crossing Horse Creek, a stream about fifty feet wide and three in depth, was attended with some difficulty, on account of its steep banks and miry bed. One wagon stalled completely, and nearly an hour's time was lost in consequence.

As we proceeded up the Platte the soil of the bottom lands became more sterile

than we had found it lower down, and increased dreariness is therefore a noticeable feature. Grass grows sparsely, and is more and more giving way to wild sage, cactus and mustard plants. It is no contradiction to say the soil is sterile where such vegetation luxuriates, for the very presence of these plants is proof of sterility. Their growth denotes barrenness and desolation.

119 Some trees passed on the banks of the river bore marks of the axes of emigrants, many being stripped of their boughs and branches. The Platte, as we approached the mountains, narrowed rapidly, not exceeding perhaps a hundred yards in width. On its numerous islands we observed many trees felled for removal to Fort Laramie, about twenty-five miles ahead.

While the morning was wintry cold we suffered from intense heat in the afternoon-- a wide contrast in temperature.

For the past two days some emigrant companies seem determined to keep pace with us; passing us at our noon camps, only, however, to be left behind at night. Ransom's is one of these to-day; yesterday the Platte City company was in the chase.

Our evening camp was beside a beautiful mountain stream, flowing hurriedly over a gravelly bed, with willows lining its banks. At a short distance from camp were the ruins of a small trading post, formerly known, I believe, as Fort Bernard. Distance, thirty miles; total from Independence, six hundred and fifty-four miles.

120 Tuesday, May 29th.--Fearing that Laramie River, at its crossing about ten miles distant, might be too deep to ford, Stewart had directed the morning watch to arouse the camp at two o'clock, so that if the stream had to be ferried we would have the start of companies encamped in our neighborhood. The corporal of the guard, however, imagining that the morning was too dark for so early a start, undertook to disobey orders. Our driver, Bagby, fortunately a sort of night owl, happening in the still of the morning to hear some rustling sounds in one of the camps--trace chains clanking, whips cracking, and the like--hurriedly left his bed and called up the camp. It was, however, too late to prevent Ransom's company from passing us. With the intent that our slumbers might not be disturbed, our neighbors very considerably made a wide circuit. It was half past three when we got under way, and at seven o'clock we struck Laramie River. It fortunately was

121 low enough to ford, being scarcely three feet in depth. Its width was about forty or fifty yards; its current strong.

Our noon camp was near the junction of the Laramie and Platte Rivers. Fort Laramie, which we visited, was but a short way up the Laramie fork, and near to its banks, on ground elevated about thirty feet above the river. In form quadrangular, it was built of adobes, having a court of about four hundred feet square. On three sides the walls were about fifteen feet high, enclosing shops, offices and dwellings, each having a door and window toward the court. The front part of the fort was two stories in height, a wooden staircase from the court leading to the upper floor. Besides a private entrance, there was a large one with a gate which faced toward the angles of the rivers. Over the entrance was a tower with loopholes, and at two of the angles, diagonally opposite each other, were bastions, also perforated with loopholes, through which all sides of the fort could be defended. Two brass swivels were mounted at the entrance, each bearing the inscription, "Made by John Gallagher, Pittsburgh, Pa., 1829." Fort Laramie is the principal trading post of the American Fur Company, and many Indian tribes assemble here at certain seasons of the year to exchange buffalo robes and buckskins for tobacco, whiskey, powder and lead, blankets, beads and notions. It is soon, however, to pass into possession of the United States, having been purchased for a military post, and a regiment of mounted riflemen is now on its way from Fort Leavenworth to occupy it, under command of Colonel Hoffman, whom we regard as a Pittsburgher--at least his good wife

122

would not deny the claim. The site of the fort is quite picturesque, the Black Hills being in the near background, and the Laramie peaks looming up grandly back of these.

123 It was here that Fremont, when on his first expedition, seven years ago, obtained information of the hostile intentions of some Indians collected in the mountain passes towards which he was moving. A Frenchman named Bissonnette, connected with a trading post near the fort, was his informant, and became his interpreter and guide through the region where danger was apprehended. Fremont showed a wonderful degree of pluck on this occasion, and if he had not it is more than probable his expedition would have terminated without any satisfactory results. Although his men were, in general, trappers accustomed to this mode of life, and to encounters with Indians, most of them became panic stricken and seemed on the point of deserting him or of compelling his return. Advising him to delay, he became more determined to push onward. Kit Carson, who perhaps never knew fear, made his will, and this added to the alarm of the men. The whole trouble was occasioned by a skirmish which had taken place some months previous between a party of whites and bands of Sioux and Cheyennes, in which a number on both sides were killed, including the leader of the white men and several of the Indian chiefs.

On the wide plains which extend to the foot of the Black Hills no trees are found, and on account of the antipathy of Indians to appearances of civilization, neither grain nor vegetables are raised by the occupants of the fort.

It seems to be a custom of emigrants on arriving here to lighten up, and Fort Laramie is made a dumping place for all that can be spared. It were wise not to bring goods this great distance only to be obliged to part with them. Be this as it may, it is not wise to proceed farther with anything that can be dispensed with. A few companies only are in advance of us, and these have left a considerable stock of groceries and clothing here. We passed over five hundred wagons on the Platte, besides large numbers before we came to that stream. By the time these and the thousands following have contributed their quota to what has been already left here, there will be an outfit sufficient for any trading post.

124 Lieutenant Blakey's mess, having two wagons, determined to leave one here, and a number of our messes made voluntary contributions to the stores of the fort. We found that we had more bacon than was necessary, and made a proposition to the superintendent to trade for dried buffalo meat. He declined peremptorily, but said he would permit us to leave whatever bacon we desired, provided we piled it up very carefully in a store room which he pointed out, and as for the buffalo meat, we were at liberty to take as much as we wanted. Availing ourselves of this offer, we added to a pile of bacon about the dimensions of a hay stack, a considerable quantity, and stowed away in its place in the wagon a goodly amount of the jerked meat.

A number of our party wrote letters at the fort to persons in the States, as there are occasional opportunities of forwarding them.

We observed quite a number of Indian women, the wives of traders and trappers, and their children, lounging about the fort or sitting in the doorways of the dwellings. We could not escape the conviction that soap and water were scarce, or if not so, greatly neglected. And an occasional combing of the great masses of black, matted hair might have improved the comfort of the wearers, whatever lives might have been thereby endangered. The floors of some dwellings needed soaping more than sweeping.

On resuming our march we shortly began climbing the Black Hills, the Platte on our right and Laramie fork on our left, but we were soon out of sight of both. Each

125 man, as we journeyed, wrestled with a piece of jerked buffalo, making little headway, however, for who shall describe its toughness! Our appetites were whetted by almost anything, but buffalo meat, jerked, was more than a match for them. Being a change of diet, and we anxious for any change, tugged at it with a will. Imagination can scarce conjure up a comparison. One man declared that part of the robe was still clinging to the piece he contended with. For some days there was every attempt made to consider it a luxury. Our friends gathered about us and we shared liberally with them. Some made an honest endeavor to be very fond of jerked buffalo meat, but at length had to confess that sole leather soaked in fat would have been preferable.

Our evening camp was nearly a mile beyond the Warm Springs, the water of which we used in cooking. The name properly indicates their temperature, not being hot, but simply warm. Our camp fires were a cheerful appearance, for about us an abundance of pines grew. The high peaks of mountains were in sight all day.

I saw along the road specimens of the soap plant, the bulbs of which in Mexico and probably elsewhere, are used as a substitute for the useful article which seemed so scarce at the Indians' quarters in the fort.

An emigrant train from Iowa, having wagons drawn by oxen, was passed.