

The Boy Emigrants

Fiction

119 They had looked forward with curiosity to Chimney Rock, a singular pillar of stone, standing like a round chimney on a cone-shaped mass of rock, on the south bank of the Platte. This natural landmark, several hundred feet high, is seen long before it can be reached by the emigrants toiling along the wagon-track by the river. The boys had sighted its tall spire from afar, and when

120 they camped opposite it, one night, they felt as if they had really got into the heart of the continent. They had long ago heard of this wonderful rock, and its strange shape, apparently sculptured by some giant architect, towered before their eyes at last.

"I reckon that there rock must have been pushed up by a volcano," said a tall stranger, joining the boys, as they were wondering at Chimney Rock, after having camped.

"Perhaps the soft rock and soil which once lay around it have been cut away by the rains and winds," said Barney, diffidently. "You see the bluffs near by are still wasting away from the same cause."

"Like enough, like enough. But what's the matter with that critter of your'n? 'Pears like he was gone lame."

Hi explained the difficulty, and told their visitor that they were traveling slowly for the purpose of making the trip as easy as possible for poor Bally.

"What! you don't drive that beast, do ye?"

"We have to. We have only two yoke of cattle, counting him."

"Well he'll never get well in the team. Take him out and let him crawl on by himself, and mebbe he'll mend. I've got one hundred and fifty or sixty head over there,"—and the stranger pointed to his camp on the other side of the road.

There were three wagons; two of them were immense square-topped affairs, with openings at the side, like a stage-coach door. The people lived in these wagons and slept in them at night, having several feather beds packed away in their depths. One team was made up wholly of bulls, of which there were four yoke. Just now, the cattle were at rest, and two hired men were herding them, while the women, of whom there were several, prepared supper.

121 "My name's Rose," the stranger said, when his offer of assistance had been gladly accepted. "They call us 'The Roses' along the road. I have my mother, father, and sister along with me; then there's Scoofey and his wife and baby; and Al and Aaron, they're workin' their passage through."

"What part of the country are you from?" asked Hi.

"Sangamon County, Illinoy," replied Rose. "I've heerd tell of you boys. 'The Boston Boys' they call you of the trail, don't they?"

"No, we are the Lee County boys," said Mont, smiling.

"But," exclaimed Arthur, "we are called 'The Boston Boys' too; I've often heard hhat name lately. Mont here is ffrom Boston, Captain Rose."

"It don't make no difference how you are called, boys, and I allow we'll get along together for a spell. We're traveling the same road, and as long as we are, you're welcome to the use of one of my steers. I allow that you'll be willing to take hold and help us drive the herd now and then?"

They boys willingly consented to this arrangement, and poor Bally, next morning, was taken out of the yoke and allowed to go free in the drove of the Roses. But the relief came too late. Each day the ox traveled with more difficulty. Every morning, before starting, and every noon, when stopping for the usual rest, Bally was thrown down and his foot re-shod and cleansed. It was of no avail. Barney took him out of hhe herd and drove him alone, ahead of the rest. But it was agony for the poor creature; he could barely limp along.

In a day or two the train, now quite a large one, reached Ancient Ruins Bluffs, a wonderful mass of rock, resembling towers, walls, palaces, and domes, worn by time and

122 crumbling to decay. Here the road became rough and stony, and the way by the side of the beaten track was hard for the lame ox. Barney and Arthur clung affectionately to Bally. He was an old friend, and, notwithstanding his vicious manner of using his horns, they did not like to leave him. Reluctantly, they gave him up here. They must go on without him, after all.

When they moved out of camp in the morning, Bally, who had been lying down watching the preparations for the day's march, got on his feet with difficulty, as if ready to go on.

"Never mind, old fellow," said Mont. "You needn't bother yourself. We will leave you here to feed by yourself and get well, if you can."

"Good-by, Bally," said Arthur, with a little pang, as they moved off. The creature stopped chewing his cud and looked after his comrades with a wild surprise in his big brown eyes. He stood on a little knoll, regarding the whole proceeding as if it were an entirely novel turn of affairs.

"Good-by, Bally," again said Arty, this time with a queer, choking sensation in his throat. He actually snuffled in his big bandanna handkerchief. Tom, by way of changing the subject, walked by Tige's head, and, looking into the eyes of that intelligent animal, said:

"Well, if there ain't a tear on Tige's nose! He's sorry to get shut of Bally, after all!"

"Oh, you talk too much," said Barney, testily.

So they left Bally looking after them as they climbed the ridge and disappeared behind Ancient Ruins Bluffs.

123 That very night, as if to supply the place of their lost friend, a new acquaintance came to their camp. It was a large mongrel dog, yellow as to color, compactly built,

and with a fox-like head. Dogs were not common on the plains. This waif had been running along the road alone for some days past. The boys had often seen him, and had supposed that he belonged to some train behind them. His feet were sore with travel, and he was evidently masterless.

"Poor fellow!" said Mont, pityingly. "Give me the arnica out of the medicine-chest, and I will fix some buckskin socks on his feet."

The dog accepted these kind attentions, and, as soon as he was let loose again, sat down and deliberately tore off his moccasins with his teeth. While he was licking his sore feet, Johnny, who had been out with Tom, gathering fuel on the bluffs, came in with a load on his back. He dropped his burden with an air of astonishment, and exclaimed:

"Bill Bunce's dog!"

"Sho!" said Hi. "What's his name?"

"Pete," replied the boy, who could hardly believe his eyes.

"Well, Pete," said Hi, "where's yer master? 'Cordin'to all accounts he's a bad egg. Pity that there dog can't talk."

But Pete had nothing to say. He shyly accepted Arthur's proffers of friendship, and from that moment became a regular member of the company.

"We've got such a lot of grub, I s'pose, we must needs take in a yaller dog to divide with," privately grumbled Tom to his brother that night. "Recon Arthur'll want to pick up a jackass rabbit for a pet, next thing you know."

"If you don't like it, sonny, you can go back, you know," replied Hi, who was cross and sleepy. Pete's position in the camp was assured.

124 A few days after this, while near Fort Laramie, they had a chance to dispose of their new friend. Just as they were camping, a party of mounted Indians, of the Brulé Sioux band, came galloping up to their tent. They were splendid fellows, dressed in the fullest and gayest costume of the Indian dandy. Their hair was loosely knotted behind and stuck full of brilliantly dyed feathers, which hung down their backs. Their buckskin leggings, moccasins and hunting-frocks were covered with embroidery in colored quills, the handiwork of their squaws. Bright red blankets dangled down from their shoulders, and about their necks were hung strings of shells, beads, and bears' claws, with rude silver ornaments. Their faces were painted with red and yellow ochre, and one of them, the chief, wore a tortoise-shell plate over his decorated forehead, like the visor of a cap.

These gorgeous visitors sat stately on their horses, and regarded our young emigrants with an air of lofty disdain.

"How!" said Mont, who had been taught good manners, if the Sioux had not. The chief grunted, "Ugh!" in reply to this customary salutation. Then he happened to see Pete.

"You sell him?" pointing to the dog.

"No, no," said Arthur, in a whisper. "Don't sell him, Mont. He wants to eat him, probably."

"No sell him," promptly replied Mont. "Good dog. We keep him."

Thus rebuffed, the Indians unbent somewhat from their dignity, and the chief, carefully extracting from a bead-worked pouch a bit of paper, handed it to Barnard with the remark, "You read um."

The paper proved to be a certificate from Indian Agent Thomans that the bearer was a peaceable Indian, "Big

125 Partisan" by name, and that he and his band were not to be molested by white people whom they meet. These dusky visitors, thus introduced, dismounted and stalked through the camp, saying nothing, but looking at everything with stolid gravity.

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128 Fort Laramie was not a very interesting place to the boys. It hardly repaid them for the trouble they had in crossing the river to get to it. But here they found a store kept by an army sutler, and Mont said that he should really enjoy buying something by way of proving to himself that he was in a spot where something besides Indian manufactures were for sale. Arty looked longingly on some dry, powdery figs, and ancient candy which were among the sutler's stock in trade; but he compromised with himself, and bought five cents' worth of aged raisins, which he generously divided with his comrades, Tom and Johnny.

They all very much admired the nicely dressed officers, who wore as fine uniforms, and "put on as many airs" (as Bush said) as if they lived among white folks. Then there were houses--real houses--finished with siding and painted white, and with stone chimneys. Some of these were used on officers' quarters, and some were barracks for the soldiers. These they examined with curious interest. They had seen no houses for several weeks. This was a little village in the wilderness.

129 At the crossing of the South Platte, a few days after, the young emigrants found another trading-post. It was in a rude log hut on the bank of the stream; and a very queer stock of goods was crowded into it. There were pipes, mining tools, playing-cards, flour, bacon, sugar, boots and shoes, and even buttons, thread, and needles. But the prices! They were tremendous.