

NATURAL HISTORY  
OF  
WESTERN WILD ANIMALS  
AND GUIDE FOR

HUNTERS, TRAPPERS, AND SPORTSMEN;

embracing

Observations on the Art of Hunting and Trapping, a description  
of the physical structure, homes, and habits of fur-bearing  
Animals and others of North America, with general  
and specific rules for their capture; also, nar-  
ratives of personal adventure.

BY

DAVID W. CARTWRIGHT.

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Written By  
Mary F. Bailey, A.M.

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## VI.

## A TRAMP TO CALIFORNIA IN 1852.

The desires of my boyhood were to be more than realized. My dreams of life in a wild country were to be no longer dreams. In the early spring of 1852, in company with two others, I started from my home in Southern Wisconsin, to conduct a company of men across the plains to California.

For any number of persons to undertake an overland journey to California a score of years ago was to set a naught the pleadings of anxious friends, who were to be left behind, to face a long and exceedingly tedious journey, and one fraught in many cases with imminent peril. It was to travel, even in well equipped and thoroughly furnished companies, at such disadvantageous rates as would mock the fruitful imagination of even appreciative travelers, while crossing many of those same rivers, plains, mountains or mountain passes, but who view them at a rapid rate from the windows of some Pullman palace car, upon the Union Pacific Railroad. While now, children may be put in the care of some watchful conductor, or partial stranger, and be safely conveyed in the lapse of a few days to their places of destination upon the extreme western coast; while timid travelers and infirm people have but to be seated and wrap about them, as with a garment, a spirit of fearless quiet, and bidding good-night to an Atlantic home can so soon say good-morning to the Golden Gate: twenty years ago no man ever dreamed of

166 going alone from shore to shore, and companies of stout-hearted, fearless men, many of whom were in those days, figuratively speaking, crazy to reach that land flowing with gold and money, not unfrequently lost members from their ranks, who were literally crazed by the exposures and anxieties of the journey. Then, as now, not all the men of any company that would be organized could make good pilots through a trackless or an unknown land; and then, as now, what is everybody's business is nobody's business, and this saying applied to the case in hand, to be understood, that every man for a pilot would soon leave no man for a pilot, it was safer and pleasanter for a company to be subject to the leadership of an authorized guide.

Gold, gold, gold, was the excited cry all over the land. It was the great Emancipation Proclamation of the day, and California was the Canada of the slave to poverty. It was this cry of gold that impelled the majority of the men composing the company of which I was one of the guides to leave their homes, and brave the dangers of such a journey at such a time. There was thirty-three men in that company, twenty-one of whom were residents of Sullivan. These, understanding that it was in every respect the better policy to secure one or more guides, had engaged Mr. Miles Homes, Mr. John Nutter, and myself to conduct them to that promising land. We were each to receive two hundred dollars for taking the men across to California.

These thirty-three men were all of them at the time residents of Southern Wisconsin. The State was then in its infancy, and no home in it was other than a pioneer's home. To men living in such homes as these did, where every man's neighbor lived on a footing with himself, and where, though the necessities of life might be quite well

167 supplied, the luxuries and even the comforts of older homes had scarcely been talked of as a possible addition to what they already possessed; to these men, an overland journey to the western coast possessed none of



those attractive features so inviting to the west-bound traveler of to-day. They were men used to toil and to privations, but who were bent on getting that curative of so many of the ills of life, that ever precious gold. The difficulties of the way between them and their promised treasures they were bound to meet with manly courage. What they did, and how they fared, it falls to me after the lapse of more than a score of years to tell you.

Having once decided to go, and the necessary arrangements having been freely discussed and in due time carried to completion, the company was, according to arrangement, to meet at the house of your narrator. The eleventh of March was the inauguration day of the great event. I say the great event, and I think I am justified in calling it such, to some of us, at least, and as there's no one of the company here to contradict me, I shall not recall the statement.

While I know that my neighbors are coming, but before they reach my door, I try to settle beyond a doubt, if I am ready to leave my family, in which there were several young boys, upon a frontier home, to care for themselves as best they can, and if I can believe that all will be well with them, should I never return. It was to be a journey of several months, at the best, of exposure and fatigue. As incivility is nowhere the type of a true gentleman; but as, on the contrary, a hearty welcome is the best thing that can be offered a guest, let me put you in a position to feel something of that welcome, which I felt, as I opened the door, for some of the men with whom I went to come in.

168

Mr. Holmes, who as my partner in the undertaking, was born in Waterbury, Massachusetts, of excellent parentage. His family connections are well identified with important manufacturing interests of the State, and many of them are exceedingly wealthy. He was a man of strong executive ability and business-like habits. He had been for a number of years a merchant in Georgia, prior to his removal to Wisconsin, where I first became acquainted with him. He was appointed Colonel of State militia of Wisconsin, by Governor Dodge. You would like him, and were you to enter into any business relations with him, you might rest assured he would not fail you, nor would he in any way do violence to his promises; he would also, doubtless, be on the ground before you were, at the time appointed for any convocation, or for work in any shape. One must be up and addressed to get in ahead of such a man. He was stout and brave, and yet sympathetic and easily moved to tears. Apparently fearless of danger, and regardless of suffering, he was in truth as much excited in sympathy for the sufferings of those around him, as he was scornful of any coward's cry of lions in the way.

Mr. Nutter, who was the third partner, and who as elected to the captaincy of the company, may be known by his fine athletic frame and robust form, his healthy countenance and complexion, darkened somewhat by exposure to the sun, hands, and muscles generally, hardened by actual contact with the toils of life, and his dark, piercing eyes, which if they were darkened by other cause than nature's choice, must have been by the charred remains of the many fires that have burned there. He is one of your lucky fellows, and he makes those lucky, too, with whom he is associated. We shall need him many times before we reach our journey's end; and as

169

well might one expect a Yankee question-maker to be outwitted by a California story-teller, as for a party like ours to expect to get through such a journey in safety without taking into their number this ingenious fellow, or some of his pedigree; though they may not be related to him by



the ties of consanguinity, if they are by mental aptitudes, the end is accomplished; for the never failing luck of coming right side up with care, will serve them many a good turn, and disarming men of doubts and discouragements, will put in their stead confidence and good humor. If there's a river to be crossed, and no one can find a fordable spot; if there's extra baggage to be packed, and no one can find a place to stow it away; if there's a bad place in the road, and no one knows how to get around or over it; if it is so hot or so cold, so wet or so dry, that no one can tell how to adapt himself to the circumstances and keep on the march, Nutter is in his element, and no sooner is the difficulty apparent than his head and his hands are hard at work to make a way of escape. If a trail is lost and the heavens withholding help, keep back behind their clouds the twinkling starts, his head is clear, and in the twinkling of his eye you may find your assurance that all will yet be well. If you still doubt it, he has but just returned from such a trip, and knows whereof he speaks. Besides all this, he is a jolly fellow and will be excellent company upon the road.

170 Charles Hibbard, a man of excellent principles and upright morality, is a quiet, thorough-bred gentleman. Though by no means a conversationalist, as the world calls such, he must yet be in possession of one of the key secrets of good conversation; he always stops talking before berating his neighbors. He shows himself friendly to every one, and all are friends to him. For his cheerful, happy spirit, and consequent wholesome influence upon us, he was welcome to our number.

Charles Dunning was born of fighting stock. I think he was. Physiologists tell us of the varied forms and functions of the corpuscles of the blood; that some are red and some are white; that the former exceed the latter in numbers; that the latter are the larger, and that the red ones are doubtless the product of the white ones. Now it is certain that the blood which coursed his veins was fired by elements somewhat antagonistic. The milk of human kindness was there, the white corpuscles of his nature, a pugilistic spirit, calling for bloody revenge, if need be, the red corpuscles. The former, when observed displayed the generous, warm-hearted man; the latter, though more frequently manifested, may have been, after all, the outgrowth of the former, produced by a desire to see every man receive his just rewards, to see humanity rewarded and malice punished.

171 Stephen Davenport, who took with him a son, resided in Jefferson Co., Wisconsin. He had a strong inclination to corpulency; whether that inclination was wholly mental, or wholly physical, or a mixture of the two, his personal appearance and further acquaintance with him might furnish you a good chance to learn. Some one, speaking from 1874, asks if he belongs to the Fat Men's Association. We cannot tell you; but his credentials at the time to which I refer you for an introduction, would have been accepted by said Association as readily as you should now accept his company; for he was both fat and jolly, his two hundred avoirdupois being well balance by his love of fun. His love of a horse exceeded almost any other display of his affections. Nothing seemed to suit him better than to get a good horse, and to care for it well. He was easily excited, and was then very strong. I have known him, when under excitement, to carry weights that in a state of relaxation he could not, with the help of two able-bodied men, lift from the ground.

Of the Jaquith brothers there were three. They would go everywhere, and you would think all at once, up hill and down, upon high peaks or rocks, through ravines and across streams, to see what could be seen, and to hear what could be heard. They will make good picket men: their quick ears will



catch the first sound of coming danger; their judgment, quick to act, will soon decide the case in hand. As for ability to mimic all the strange noises, earthly and unearthly sounds, there's none can beat them. Coyotes, Prairie-dogs, Buffaloes, birds upon the wing or in the woods, and Io, the poor Indian, stand their chances alike of keeping in advance of their imitative powers. They are the fun-makers for the crowd. Should they, prompted by their native inquisitiveness, go too far beyond the camping ground, some one must look them up; else after some wearisome march, when a jolly chat over the evening meal, and about the cheerful fire, would make the men forget the fatigues of the day, and fit them for a healthful sleep, they must wrap the mantle of their gloomy moods about them, and lay them down to sleepless dreams.

Henry Torry, who was an active, nervous, plucky little fellow, was the oddest genius in the company. His drollery, of which he was sometimes conscious and sometimes not, was not to be matched by any of us. He is one of the many who have been, by some fall, knocked "sensible" in less than a minute. He says he fell from a trespass, 'twas no precipice, I assure you, and that he remained sensible for some time after his fall. He is an excellent man, and his excellence is in keeping with his zeal for the promotion of good.

172 If any of the company should think that I have forgotten that Abram Balsar was one of us, he is as much mistaken as if I were to say that our food never becomes a part of us physically, and that the condition of the stomach has no influence upon the conduct of the head. Balsar was by profession a baker. At the time of which I write, he was practically both cook and baker. He was also a good fiddler. You may call him a sort of homoeopathist. He was, in his way. He was an expert in dealing out palatable dishes, sweet to the mouth as are sugar-coated pills; and when, after the march of the day, he had, by virtue of his office and by his willing hand, helped to place upon our rustic board what satisfied our cravings of hunger; and when there was still a hunger not touched by bread or meat, he could fill our ears with what made music in the heart, and satisfied its cravings for something restful and cheering.

If you, my readers, have also read the preface to this book, you have learned that David is not doing all this writing for himself. Therefore, seizing my chance to take a little advantage of him, I purpose here to intrust to your supposed safe keeping a secret. It concerns David. I think his motives in going, though I've never heard him say it, were his love for the woodsman's life, his chance while thus living to still work for his family, and his share in the chances of the good time coming, when they should reach the Golden State. I think, from what I know of him, that his friends wanted him to go; because his head was a capital compass; because he was not afraid of wolf or bear, or Indian, crows or scarecrows; because there was no other so good a hunter and trapper whose services they could procure, and through him procure the needed game. Should he ever learn of this, and charge the telling to me, I shall simply tell him that he owed it to

173 himself, to tell you for himself why he was released from picket and other duties, and that, should he revise this book, he must tell you, in his own queer way, of his adventures in '52, and not be moved by that modesty that now cheats him out of saying a word in his own behalf. Just one other thing let me tell you, and we are ready for the forward march. When our hunter tells you his own story, he will doubtless call himself "David and I," as that's an old trick of his. Many of his neighbors will vouch for the truth of this, that when he leaves them he will say, "David and I must go."



As the servants of the company, there were four ox teams and one horse team. We had twelve yoke of oxen, three yoke were hitched to a wagon, and we had five horses. Four of the horses were driven, and one was used for a saddle horse. Our wagons were well loaded, and thus equipped, our merry, sober men left my house, leaving behind us a company of about two hundred, who were possibly less merry and more sober than we were. The next day two companies met us, one from Cold Springs, and the other from Lake Mills, adding to our number twelve men and nine yoke of oxen, and one horse.

The roads were in very poor condition, and the water was high; but we went on, and across Illinois, following the eastern bank of Rock river, then on the east side of the Mississippi until we reached a point opposite Fort Madison. We would put up at night at some private house, or at some tavern, and at noon would feed our teams upon the road, and feed ourselves as circumstances made it most convenient.

Just before we crossed the Mississippi, an Irishman came into our camp, while we were eating our dinner, and without saying a word to any of us, took a plate and some victuals and seated himself to eat his dinner with

174 us. After he had satisfied himself and was about to leave us, Dunning demanded pay for his dinner. But, says the Irishman, "Fath and be jabers, ain't I in a free country, and hain't I got a right to eat when I please?" "Yes, and ye're in a very free country, and ye're free to pay for what ye get, too!" But poor Paddy, swearing by all that's good and great, declared that he couldn't do that, for he hadn't got any money; whereupon Dunning, either having no faith in his word, or feeling abused and determined to get satisfaction by giving Paddy no chance to digest his dinner, grabbed him by the collar, carried him to the river, and threatened to throw him in at once if he didn't fork over. Paddy, though he didn't really know that a man ever had red corpuscles in his disposition, yet appreciated the force of his determination, and handed over a five dollar gold piece.

Near the close of the day, having made arrangements with the ferry-man to take us across the river that night, we set ourselves to work to get the baggage in readiness. The boat was small and the ferry-man was obliged to make several trips before he could get us all over.

When some of the teams had been taken, and the boat was about to be reloaded, in defiance of the rule that no man or party could be ferried across until the previous engagements were fulfilled, an old Dutchman and his wife were about to drive in ahead of our men and teams, upon the boat. Some of the boys caught the horses and others caught the wagon wheels; as the Dutchman's wrath made it too hot for him in his wagon, he got out to give his wrath a good ventilation, and those impudent, ill-mannered boys a good flogging. His first clinched Nutter; but they, seeing that the struggle was unequal, lent a helping hand, doubtless with the intent to persuade him, by a practical experiment, that they rejoiced in the  
175 opportunity to rid him of such a nuisance as our Captain seemed to be to him, because he would not let the aged couple cross just when they pleased.

His wife, however, who had been left the only occupant of the wagon, looked at the matter from a different stand-point, and didn't read their intentions as I have stated them to be. She had a view of her own. I'm inclined to think she never goes anywhere without one.

If she was one of your four-handed people, as wealthy people are sometimes said to be, I cannot say, but this I know, she had a very hard fist, harder and more to be dreaded than her husband's was. Conscious of



her strength, and possibly of her indignation, she jumped from the wagon, doubled her fist, and with it struck Nutter with such vehemence as I've seldom seen displayed between man and man. She was a striking character, I can assure you, not strikingly handsome, as many women seem to wish to be, nor strikingly "tame," as some of whom we've recently heard, but striking in many of her ways.

Nutter, who was now in the position of the lightbrigade, with

"Cannon to right of them,  
"Cannon to left of them,  
"Cannon in front of them,"

for the Dutchman and his wife were all around him in no time,

"Volleyed and thundered."

"Good heavens! woman, I won't strike you; but I will whip your husband." Our boys, coming again to the rescue, proved themselves the victors, and the venerable couple decided to do, as all good old people will do, patiently bide their time to cross the river of -- Mississippi. Nutter did not soon hear the last of his unequal tussle with the Dutchman.

176 Mr. Holmes and Mr. Cole left us to go down to St. Louis, to purchase supplies for the remainder of the journey.

We went on to Des Moines, and thence across Missouri to St. Joseph. In our slow march through the State, we saw nothing, neither did we hear anything, nor did we meet, nor were we met by anything beyond the ordinary country, and yet in a new and sparsely settled one. We were outside of fences, but not beyond the pales of the white man's habitations, nor westward of his pale face. Houses were rude, but there were comfortable ones: there were some roads and such as we would be ashamed to underrate, knowing as we do, of the hard work that is required to make good ones in a new country. The soil, of which clay is an important constituent, was wet and sticky. The streams were high and there were no bridges. Several of these bridged ourselves, but as we did it on foot, or on horseback, the bridges did no one any good, except ourselves. There had been as yet no pursuing Egyptians, nor red-man's host to follow upon our trail across these streams, in the vain hope of catching us on the other side, or to be engulfed in a fordable river. One we could not ford; but upon examination we found our spirits were higher than its waters; and by dint of perseverance and a little management, we succeeded in crossing and in reaching the other shore high and dry. We felled trees and run our wagons over on them, and we swam our cattle and horses across. This State, as many more inhabitants of it can testify, is in many respects physically beautiful.

Soon after reaching St. Joseph, I received a letter from Mr. Holmes, telling what day he expected to start from St. Louis, and that he would be on board the Seeloday.

177 Our next news from St. Louis was that the boat, while on its way up the river, had been blown up, that four hundred lives had been lost, and that all of the freight was lost. A chill of horror ran through our hearts, as it did throughout the land. Many households were to bow in sorrow, if not submission, at the loss of some loved one. Four hundred lives lost! and that our friend Holmes had escaped was scarcely to be thought of. All of the freight lost! and we knew that our food stuffs were gone. The loss of Mr. Holmes would be a doubly great loss to me; for we, as partners in the undertaking, had been bound under a forfeiture of two-hundred dollars each, to the nineteen men who started from my house with



us, should we fail to take them through to California according to contract. There was not money enough in the camp with which to buy our necessary outfit, in case the worst possible news should prove to be the truth. A merchant in St. Joseph, knowing our extremity, told Nutter and myself that he would furnish us with what we wanted, that we might pay him what we could, and send him the balance of the indebtedness after reaching California. This he would do in case our men were dead, or our provisions were lost. That day a boat came in from down the river, but brought no word from Mr. Holmes, nor of him. I determined to go down the following day, to learn something about them; should it be good news or bad, we could wait no longer in suspense. A boat came up just before mine was to go down, and when it landed I saw our men upon her deck. 'Twas a joyful moment to me, and though it was a joyful thought to Mr. Holmes that he had reached his men in safety, his eyes were as if still riveted upon some awful scene. He took my hand with a warm grasp, but he was speechless. Large tears coursed unchecked over his manly face. I will not, with  
178 the sneer of some of you, call them womanish tears; for 'twas manly to weep with those who wept, to weep for those bereaved.

It was some little time before he could control his emotions, and could give us any details of the disaster. When he did, it was with no parade of sensational narrative that he recounted to us the events of the terrible catastrophe, but from an overburdened heart, still strangely horrified, that he said to us: I saw, as I approached our boat, that it was very heavily loaded. I feared that it would give us trouble; but as I was to be only a passenger, and not wishing to make myself offensively conspicuous, I kept my fears in check. After we had started, and were in a bend in the river, at which point the stream was very rapid, and the boat could not, for its freight, work its way over the waves, and after it had made two attempts and failed, I said to the captain "Throw out a line and let a hundred of us get out and pull on the rope, and help you over this." "No! I won't! I'll run over myself, or blow her to h---l." "Have you ever blowed one up?" I asked. "Yes, I have, and I done the old thing good justice, too." I went around to the engine room, and saw that the safety valve was tied down. I said to Cole, "That boiler will burst, and we're a shipwrecked set. Let's go to the stern." We had scarcely reached it when the deck was raised, everything rose up, the boat was instantly shattered to pieces, and scattered upon the waste of waters. How we escaped I cannot tell. Hundreds of bodies of dead and dying were mingled in that sea of blood, for the blood of mangled bodies was flowing fast and free. The living were making loud moans, calling in their anguish for help; some calling for their friends, children for their parents, and the parent for her child. A mangled part of the captain's  
179 body was found upon a shed about four hundred feet from the water. He had lost everything, and there was nothing but the few shreds of clothing left upon his body, and his upturned face, by which one could identify the perpetrator of that wicked deed.

Holmes was determined to be a man and being no longer able to help any of the wreckers, he turned his attention to his own business. He had had the goods insured in St. Louis, and proposed that we sell the insurance to the merchant of whom we must get our supplies. This we did, and on the seventeenth of April we started out from St. Joseph. Our first six miles west from the river, which we crossed on a ferry, was through a lightly timbered section. We then struck a prairie, upon which we found a little belt of timber along its streams. The soil or mould, was black, loose, and fertile.

Taking a north western course from St. Joseph, after crossing several small streams, and for some time following the Little Blue, we came to one of its tributaries which was too deep for fording. The water was at that time unusually high; we must, therefore, cross it in some other way than by wading. We had prepared ourselves for such emergencies. We had made blocks to put on the bolsters of the wagons and under the boxes, to raise them nearly to the tops of



the stakes. Having put these blocks upon the several wagons, we tied the wagon boxes down so that they could not be washed off by the current. By this means we crossed two streams before reaching Fort Kearney.

By this time several small companies, going our way, had joined with ours, making our number about sixty-five. We did not hold ourselves responsible for their safe passage through the western wilds; but we traveled to-

180 gether, and were all by agreement subject to certain rules. We were fast approaching a country where it behooved us to

'Be up and watching,  
With a heart for any fate.'

We therefore put out a guard every night to watch the camp. This guard was appointed by a daily draft, or better this, that every man took his turn, which was determined by response to roll call, and he was obliged to serve or furnish a substitute. There were generally two on picket together, and in cases of evident necessity, more were appointed, as circumstances dictated. We traveled at the rate of eighteen miles a day through this section of the country, and were now where we did not see a woodsman's clearing, or a prairie home. We were "Out West," that uncivilized, indefinite, out of the world sort of place, which so many people never expected to see who now live there, in many cases even in opulence, and who still say "Going out west," as though there were no "aguish west countree" east of them. We were beyond the clamor of Presidential campaigns, and coming elections, and cared nothing practically for all their filibustering, if the people would only make sure of having the District of Columbia well stocked with good official stuff. So long as the American Eagle, and the Star Spangled Banner should wave over our heads, and the red man should not pick the pockets of this man of his tobacco, nor of that one of his last "mon," and the coyotes should not pick the bones of any of us, we counted ourselves happy, and richer by far than any rascal in the land who should go to the polls to deposit, with a telling effect, a pocket full of votes.

The antelope began to show themselves and I began to show signs of increased happiness. Sometimes I would  
181 see them on the road ahead of us, or not far from the side of the road as we passed along. Of course I used to take my rifle and go out after them. No sooner would I start than three or four, or a half dozen of the men, taking their guns too, would follow me. Knowing the excessive timidity of this most beautiful creature, I soon resolved to go quietly back to the teams, when any of the men should follow me. So many hunters would always scare away the game. It was, therefore, arranged that I should do the hunting for the party, and as a compensation should be released from picket duty.

When about sixteen miles east of Ft. Kearney we pitched our next camp. We ate our breakfast very early in the morning, and as we were finishing our meal an Indian came up from the brush that grew close by the river bank, came into our camp and wanted to know which was our chief. We pointed him to Captain Nutter. Stepping up to him he asked, "Your chief?" "Yes." Striking his hand upon his breast, the Indian said, "Me chief, too; good Indian." By this time another had come in, presently a third, and in a few minutes a "big heap Indians" had come into our camp, all of them mounted upon ponies or mules, and all armed with guns. There might have been three hundred of them. The Captain was frightened. If any of you were witnesses of the childish, yet actual fright of the little school girl, who, in her blissful ignorance of the fact that there were any colored people, was so terrified at the entrance of a



colored boy into her school that she could neither study nor recite; that after the children had learned what was the matter with her, and had set him up to all sorts of mischievous pranks, and she used to hide in every hidable place; that when she stood near him one day in the spelling class, and he conscious of her fear of him had fixed his w

182 black eyes upon her, and she was so overcome by it that the teacher, supposing her to be sick, sent her home to be cared for; if you saw her a few months afterwards, when in a new home she was one day visiting a family in whose house there was a colored servant, and when that servant, suddenly making her appearance from the basement, entered the living room, she could not at first, for her fright, utter a sound; but, her whole frame in agitation, she started and in an amusing attitude stood pointing her finger towards the black visage; and when this new mode of treatment so amused Aunt Dinah that she opened her great white eye-balls and stretched her mouth to the fullest extent of its great capabilities and thus brought the child's struggling words to a squeaking utterance, she cried, "There, see! see there! there! If, I say, any of you knew of this girl's fright, you are easily prepared to appreciate the Captain's condition on this memorable morning. We did not tell you at the first all that we knew about our friend Nutter. He was sometimes badly frightened. Rushing to the cooks he said "Stop, don't; don't stop to wash the dishes. We are in a bad spot; we shall all be killed." Holmes and I, just before the Indians had come up, had for the safety of the guns shot them off. Says Nutter: "Put up those guns; they will think we are afraid of them." "They will know we are ready for them," I said. One of them came up to Holmes, or the Colonel as we often called him, and wanted him to give him some tobacco. Holmes took out a large piece from his pocket, and cutting off a small piece gave it to the Indian. That made him angry, and in an instant he sprang to grasp a sheathed knife from Holmes which was attached to a belt and hung at his side. The Colonel was a large powerful man, but quick and nervous, a man who was afraid of nothing; there was

183 not one cowardly trait in his disposition. I've sometimes wondered if the Devil himself could frighten him much. With his powerful fist he struck the Indian, and set him standing on his back. These Indians belonged to the Pawnee tribe. They were the largest, most muscular and most powerful Indians I have ever seen, and in fact this is true of the tribe as compared with all other tribes. Some of our men were terribly frightened, and began to give them everything they wanted. One man from Virginia, who had with him his family, and who belonged to one of the companies that had recently joined ours, had two teams, and from one of the wagons he began to feed them with crackers. I said to him, "Don't you give them any more; you will starve to death." "What shall I do?" he said. "Give them powder and balls; I am good for two of them at the first shot." One of the Indians looked up at me and laughed. I have always thought he understood what I said, and I read in his laugh that they were not after our blood, but our victuals. It proved to be the correct translation of their purpose. Finding they could not get much they left us. We got up our teams and started on.

There were two brothers from Missouri who had joined us. I have forgotten their names, if in fact I ever knew them, for we always called them Missouri. They had been across the plains in 1850. They had with them two cows and two horses which they were going to take to California. One of these cows had a little calf. These men were so badly frightened by the Pawnees that they did not even look for their cow. The Indians stopped about two miles beyond our camp. We passed them on our way, and when we were about two miles beyond them I missed the cow. I spoke to one of the men about it and found that they already knew that it was left behind,

184 and that they were afraid to go back after it. I offered to go with one of them to get it. He was afraid to go unless one other man would accompany us. We returned to our camp, where we found the calf. Its throat had been cut and it was left to die. On our return to our ox train we found the cow in



in the hands of another party. When we reached Ft. Kearney we found our Pawnee friends there and found the officers rolling out to them barrels of flour and pork. They had told the government officers that they were about starved, that they had intended to rob our company; but they found some very resolute men among them. The officers were driven to give them something. The Sioux Indians were then at war with the Pawnees. We went on a little beyond the Fort and camped for the night.

The next day we went about as far as usual and camped by the river again. The river was at this place about a mile wide, but exceedingly shallow; it was at no place more than two feet deep, and was full of sand bars and islands. This sand is cold quick-sand. We hitched six yoke of oxen to our several wagons and crossed the river. We could at no place, while crossing, stop our teams lest they should sink in the sand. The day had passed its middle mark before we were all safely across the river. We were now on its northern bank. We stopped for the afternoon to rest ourselves and our cattle.

185 After dinner some of us thought it a good way to rest, to go out hunting. The Colonel, one of the Missouri men and myself started, followed in a short time by fifteen or twenty others. Back from the river flats we could see buffalo. The country was very level for four or five miles from the river. Having crossed this level tract, we came into an undulating region, a beautiful rolling prairie country. The bluffs were not high but they were treeless and almost shrubless, smooth, clean bluff upon bluff, over which the eye could reach in its clear vision mile after mile. The tops of these bluffs, as far as the eye could reach were covered with herds of buffalo. A grand, good sight for my eyes. Missouri said that he had killed a great many buffaloes, and that one must hit them farther back and lower upon the body than any other animal. Agreeing to aim as he directed, I soon after fired and hit one of the animals; but I knew by its motions that it had been hit too far back. I was sorry; still I believed that I could, by carefully changing my position, kill it. That I might do it, Missouri agreed to keep perfectly quiet; but at the critical moment he called to his brother, who was about eighty rods behind us. My buffalo, which wasn't mine, called to its brothers, and the whole herd went off. The Colonel and I were, as you may suppose, indignant that we had thus lost our game; but by telling of him, I have now had my revenge. We sat down and beheld the grand retreat. The land as far as the eye could reach was blackened with the huge, wild creatures. There were doubtless thousands of them, and somewhere in their number the wounded one.

186 We turned our course and soon saw a herd of twenty-five or thirty coming towards us. We tried to head them off, but we were too far away. We shot at them, but did not kill any. There had been so many men out amongst them that day, that they were excited and easily frightened. We started for camp. On our way we saw a buffalo coming, followed by a man on horseback, driving at full speed. When we had come within a hundred rods of them, the buffalo, doubtless frightened by us, turned about. Its pursuer was now only a few rods distant and he fired at it. He hit it; but after running a little ways, the two being in close proximity, the buffalo started to fight the man. He fired at it again, and the creature fell and very soon died. The man had shot it in the heart. As we helped him turn it over I made up my mind that I had shot my buffalo too far back upon the body. I resolved, and I think it an advisable resolution for any one to make, that I would always shoot as close to the fore leg as possible, and about one-third of the way up the body. As there is a hump on the shoulders, unless one is careful he will shoot too high. We all reached camp in good season; but I cannot say that we did in as good spirits, for none of us had brought into camp any game. I found at night that I had left my powder-horn, doubtless where I had made my first shot.



We had planned to get an early start in the morning, and to make a big drive. We therefore started before sunrise. I quietly asked Hibbard to go with me to get my powder-horn, and suggested that while we were gone we might possibly get some game. We told no one except Holmes where we were going, lest the fright among the wild herds should be repeated, and we again defeated, and our men as bad off as villages without a meat market. As the teams started we left the road and took our march towards the bluffs. I found my horn; but there were no buffaloes in sight. We moved on westward, and after a little struck for some bluffs a mile or two from us. As we reached the top of a bluff we saw large herds of buffaloes, two or three miles away. Our courage was good and our determination to push our way on towards them. When we were within a half-mile of them, there seemed to be two ravines, one on each side of them. I said to Hibbard if he would approach them by the left hand ravine I would go up on the right side of them, and we might both get a shot at them. When I had reached a point in the ravine which I

187 thought was opposite the herd, I carefully ascended the knoll. I saw one get up. I fired at him. He ran a little ways, then fell dead. Just as I had reloaded my gun, three antelope ran past me; aiming at one of them, I shot it, and when it had run on a few rods it tumbled over. I approached it, and unjointing the hip bone I carried the saddles off with me. I cut out twelve or fifteen pounds of the buffalo steak, and putting my gun barrel through the skin, which, by the way, I had left on for this purpose, I carried it over my shoulder. I could not find Hibbard, so I went on alone.

I thought I was about ten miles north of the road. I started in a southwesterly direction. After a time I saw several elk, and a little further along I saw a buffalo go down into a ravine. I approached, on my way, within five rods of it before it saw me. When it did it was frightened and ran off. I was willing it should go. On, and still further on I went. I crossed a large flat piece of land, beyond which there was quite a formidable ridge. As I looked upon them and I thought they looked at me. I thought it rather mean in them to get so exactly in my way as they had done, but resolved to go on and take my chances, and meet my fate with a brave heart. We were then in the Sioux country, not exactly in Tartary, but where good Tartars lived. As they saw me coming they seated themselves as though ready and waiting for me. Well! I thought, I'm ready for you; yes, and good for two of you any day. As I neared them, I found they were those red--y men I had not expected to meet. My Indians proved to be friendly ones. They were Hibbard and four of our men, who left the train soon after we had started out in the morning. I was glad to find they

188 were white men, whom I knew. They had killed no game, and could help me carry mine. About two o'clock we came in sight of a small herd of buffaloes. The "boys" wanted me to shoot one of them. I crawled up in shooting distance of them, fired at one and broke his shoulder. He started and ran down the hill in a direction partly towards the boys. They ran and surrounded him and commenced a series of firings upon him. I sat down to see the fun. They shot ten times, each man shooting twice. Chase advanced upon his victim, which was now in a hollow or sink hole. I called out, "Don't go any nearer; you'll get hurt." But he replied, "I'm not afraid; he is most dead; there's a stream of blood running out of his mouth." Buffalo, upon this preciation of his ability to fight, put down his head, scraped the ground with his fore foot, and made one desparate leap for Chase. He was then about twenty feet from the buffalo. The former started in hot haste; the latter followed close upon the rear. It was a run for life, and nearly even, too. The buffalo ran about fifteen rods and laid him down to die. Chase stopped as soon as he learned the fate of his pursuer. Of all the yelling and screaming and jumping I have ever heard, theirs, during this little scene, was amongst the loudest, and withal the most ludicrous. Such scenes are not often paraded upon public or private stages: this scene was natural, and



it was wild. The men were really, literally, actually frightened out of their senses for a little while; but for the by-stander, who had advised a different course, yet who believed in the end they would come out unharmed, it was decidedly laughable. They cut off what meat they could carry. I took up my load and we went on, thankful for our fun, and as thankful that none of us had been hurt. We had had nothing to eat since sunrise: we had not  
189 found any water; but despite hunger and thirst we pushed our way onward with resolution. We had lost the road, but were determined to find it. We were very tired: one thought we ought to leave our meat; but the others thought it best to keep it for future use, in case we should ever get a chance to eat again.

Just at dark we came to a brook. We could see, by their lights, thirty or forty Indians in camp not far from us. It was too dark for them to see us. With renewed courage we pushed on, not to their camp, but away from it, and our courage was doubtless increased by the hope of getting off without their knowledge of us. I believe along through the darkness, and in a strange country. In about an hour we struck the road. But here a new difficulty arose: we did not know whether our company had yet passed this point, whether they were in advance of us, or still behind us. The probabilities were, that in our circuitous marches upon our hunting grounds we had lost time, and that our men were westward of us. We resolved to go on until we should come to some camp. We fired our guns, but received no response. We traveled on another hour, then fired our guns again, and this time fire gave answer to fire. I need not tell you that we were joyful. 'Twas good news to us. Hoping that the shot came from our camp, we marched on with new life. Two of the men from camp were sent out to meet us. They proved to be our own men. We reached camp about eleven o'clock, exchanged joyful greetings, and recitals of the day's adventures. They feared we had been captured or killed. I had never been so thirsty as I was that day. The only water we had found was at the brook where we saw the Indians. I had tasted of it; but it was strong alkali water, and not fit to drink; what I did drink  
190 made me sick. The next day I was not able to sit up.

We had had no fresh meat to eat since leaving St. Joseph. The buffalo meat was dry and tough, the antelope's tender and good. The men ate very heartily of it, and one young man became very sick. It was Davenport's boy who was sick. He grew worse for several days, and died. We had stopped our train during his sickness, and did everything for him that it was possible for us to do. Mr. Knapp preached his funeral sermon, and we laid him away in the best box that we could make, and drew a large flat stone and put it over his grave to keep the coyotes from digging him up. While we were in the midst of the funeral services the coyotes were on a knoll about sixty rods from us, fighting and howling so dismally that it was difficult to hear the preacher. They had doubtless scented the corpse, and were in angry waiting for a chance to tear it to pieces.

A few mornings after, some buffaloes crossed the river, and came towards us. The men began to cry, "Cartwright, Cartwright! get out your gun, here's some game." I had resolved not to shoot another buffalo while crossing the plains, lest some one would be made sick by eating the unsavory, unhealthy stuff. I told them no. Then some of the men wanted the horses, and to go and hunt the buffaloes themselves. As there had been an agreement before starting that the hunters should not have the use of the horses, we denied them their request. Nutter and Johnson took the two mules of Virginia, as we called our Virginia comrade of whom we spoke at the time of our morning call from the Pawnees. They started on their hunt, after a while got separated from their party, ran three or four miles, a buffalo turned upon them to fight them: they shot it several times, and at last succeeded in killing it. After this supply of



buffalo meat had  
191 been devoured, the men were satisfied, and did not again ask for any more of such meat.

We were still following the Platte river on its north side, and for two hundred miles we saw no trees. There was just one tree that stood upon an island, but it was dead, and there was only one limb upon it. It had doubtless been stripped for firewood. We were obliged to do as were other travelers across the plains, to use buffalo chips for our fires. We made ditches about eighteen inches wide, and building our fires in them, we would then put our kettles across the ditch.

The Platte river, because of its sand bars, its rapidity, and its shallowness, is not navigable; though it is wide. The valley through which it courses is remarkable for its length, and for its fertility in the eastern portion of it. Its width is from eight to fifteen miles. Having passed this section of the valley, and following up the north fork, we were fast approaching the "bad lands" which lay between us and the Black Hills. The soil was sandy, and was beginning to grow alkaline in its character. Grass was becoming scarce. The land back from the river was covered with a small brush called greasewood, and with wild sage. The latter seems very much like wormwood. The prickly pear, or the cactus, grew in abundance. Acres upon acres are still covered with them. Buffaloes were becoming scarce, and antelopes were numerous. The company voted me clear from all other duties to hunt, and I furnished our own deer and one antelope; which was eaten upon the remainder of the journey. After getting an early breakfast I used to start on in advance of the teams, kill my antelope, drag it to the road, and go on. The men would pick it up as they reached the spot. Everything went off nicely when the  
192 weather was favorable, and we did not drive so far as to tire out the men. Sometimes we would be obliged to drive until late to get where we could find water and grass.

Our road was very good until we came to the Black Hills. The scenery on either side of our road was monotonous. We were hemmed in by bluffs, which shut out from view the more picturesque landscape beyond, and we saw little for a long distance but the bottom lands, treeless, springless flats. The region known as the "bad lands," and close to the hills "is about thirty by ninety miles in extent, sunk away from its prairie surroundings with almost vertical sides, and is about three hundred feet deep in its lowest part. It is filled with innumerable pinnacles, columns, and irregular masses of earth and rock, separated by labyrinthine passages, nearly destitute of vegetation, bare and sterile, but rich in fossils, geological treasures, and organic relics of extinct animals."

For many miles along this section of the river the atmosphere is so clear that the extent of vision is almost incredible. When we were opposite Chimney Rocks we were about five miles from the river, and about twenty-five or thirty miles from the rocks; yet we could distinctly see them, and could also trace the outlines of trees as they stood against them. One man told me that he had traveled the road on the south side of the Platte, and that after seeing the rocks he traveled more than half a day to reach them, and gave it up. They stand probably fifty feet high, and bear a strong resemblance to an assemblage of old chimneys. I saw teams, men, and one day an antelope at the distance of eight miles. A man at a distance of three miles would seem to be ten or twelve feet tall. We usually traveled sixteen or eighteen miles,  
193 and yet, while here, we could at night look back to our camping ground of the previous night.



About seventy-five miles of our journey through the Black Hills was very mountainous, and in places as poor. The road led back from the Platte, because the mountains came, in many places, abruptly to the river. One day there seemed to be a city some six or eight miles west of us. It proved to be the case; for the place is known as Rock City; but the city, though built of stone houses at a comfortable distance apart, is yet uninhabited. The rocks and piles of stone are, at a distance, quite house-like in appearance.

194 When we reached Fort Laramie we traded off some of our sore-footed oxen. A man was there whose business it was to exchange cattle with travelers. Two days out from the Fort we saw an immense drove of cattle on the road. Of course we wished ourselves ahead of them and Nutter commenced a race. We drove for two days and one night, stopping in that time only long enough to cook and eat our victuals. Any detailed description of our table manners upon the road during this hurried march, would be, if in keeping with the meals themselves, so soon given that you might think that we ate nothing. But we did. Suffice it to say that the meals were as enjoyable as all the circumstances in the case would allow, or as any that the young folks take when the old folks are away from home. There was more jollity than formality. We were on a spree, were not exactly on dress parade, nor on exhibition; for there were no wayside spectators. Some of the jolliest times we had on the route were during those two days. I have not, in the twenty-two years, forgotten to laugh at some of the ridiculous performances of that cattle race. The horses and cattle of the opposing party were fresh and strong, full of spirits, and running as if for life. We were to pass through barren lands, and the foremost party of course stood the better chance of finding water and grass. We won the race, and our reward was therefore the better feed.

We soon struck the Sweet Water river. To the left of the road, as we neared this stream, we saw a famous rock, which in its coloring resembles the pipe stone rock. Hundreds of names are inscribed upon it, truly indicative of the "Young America" spirit, calling for honor and renown. Two miles from this rock there is a small alkaline lake. The deposits of alkali which are formed when the lake dries up in the summer, are in some places of a considerable depth. Wagon loads of it may be, and are, then gathered with little difficulty. It is the common pearlash or soda, of commerce.

195 The Colonel and myself went out to the lake, and on nearing it we saw a huge buffalo wolf a few rods from us. He was sitting on his haunches and looking at us. Having foolishly left our guns with the teams, we could only do the best thing that circumstances might dictate. We picked up a stone and threw it at him. He greeted its harsh reception by rising in a decidedly snarling mood. His only attempt at smiling at the honor of a call from white men was an extended stretch of the mouth, with a marvelous display of white, ugly teeth. To meet this stranger any more than half way, was to look into the jaws of death, if, indeed, not to enter the same. We had no idea of traveling in that direction. If we had seriously attempted it, our purpose would have been thwarted, for at every step of ours, which brought us nearer him, that we might, if possible, stone him to death, like the coward that he was he retreated. It was a long time, however, before he left us. There was but one thing that prevented his feasting on the sweets of our flesh, and that was his natural cowardice in the presence of an antagonist, and the extremity of cowardice in the presence of a fearless human being. Many persons who live near the habitations of wolves, or who travel through their countries, would sleep better at night, and rest better by day if they would allow themselves to believe the truth of this statement, that wolves, though ferocious animals, are sneaks and cowards, and rarely attack men. Their howls make the night hideous, and their distorted features make one cringe; but, belonging to the dog family, as they do, the saying that "barking dogs never bite" is applicable to them. Even now



I regret that I left my gun in camp that day. Such an impertinent staring at us as we received at the hands, or, more literally, from the eyes and the jaws of that wolf, should not have gone unpunished. If we had only had those guns that day, we would have issued his death warrant from our gun barrels, and with our balls would have executed it upon his luckless head.

We followed the north side of the Sweet Water for twenty miles, then crossed it. At the point of crossing there was a ferry. The boat was small, and it was by a very tedious process that teams were conveyed across the river. There were a number of companies at the ferry, each one waiting its turn to cross. At the rate of passage, we would be obliged to wait three or four days before we could move on. True to his instincts, Nutter planned a way of escape for us from such tedious waiting. The river was high, but he believed we could ford it. We raised our wagon boxes as we had done before, and fastening ropes to the lower side of each box, drew it over the top, and with some men on the up stream side to hold the ropes and keep the wagons from turning as we struck the current, we started in. All of the men were taken over on horseback. The first one who went over

196 carried a rope, one end of which was fastened to the foremost yoke of oxen. The oxen were hitched to the wagons as when upon the road. There were men on horseback on the down stream side to whip up the cattle as they struck the deep water. Our risky undertaking came out all right, and in half a day we were safely crossed to the further bank of the river.

One of the men in the crowd of those waiting a transport, having seen us cross, thought to follow suit. Having taken no precaution for the safe passage of his wagon boxes, when his teams struck the current despite his best efforts at that late moment, they were turned first down stream, and then over into it. He lost almost all of his supplies, and it was with the utmost difficulty that he kept his team from drowning. He had been advised not to drive in as he did; but he was one of your self-willed men, who know their own business, and whose success in life is the measure of the soundness of their judgment.

The road on the south side of the Sweet Water was level and good. It was a well traveled road, and probably as good as any country thoroughfare in any of our States. Soon after crossing the river we reached the Devil's Gate. The ridge of rocks which lies on both sides of the river averages about three hundred feet in height, and extends nearly north and south, reaching about a mile on the north side of the river, and thirty or forty rods on the south side. As we first observed it, it seemed like one solid rock, possibly give hundred feet wide. On the south side it slopes gradually from the river to the ground. We reached it early in the morning and camped for a few hours to look at it more carefully. As we ascended the rock, we found on reaching the river that there was a clean cut passage for the flow of the water. The stream

197 as it passes through the rocks is fifteen or twenty feet wide. The rocky wall, as we looked over it into the river, is neither perpendicular nor perfectly smooth; but there are here and there projecting crags, many of which at our distance from them looked tiny, but could we have been near them, and they were in keeping with the general structure of the rocks, would have looked massive. Could we have seen the man who thought that the Natural Bridge must have been built by the Devil, and could have shown him this wonderful gateway, we presume he would have said that the post holes had been dug, the posts made and set by the same dignified personage. We did not think that, and were not unimpressed with the grandeur of the scene, and did not leave it without an increased reverence for the great architect of the universe. On a crag about one hundred and fifty feet from the top of the rock, there lay the body of a man. How, or when, or why he had reached that



spot, none of us knew; if he had been murdered by a white man or a red, if he had accidentally fallen over, or had willfully thrown himself over, were equally undecidable questions. One of the hands had in some way become unjointed, and lay at the surface close to us. It had doubtless been carried there by some vulture-like creature: the flesh had been picked off, evidently by some bird. Mr. Knapp carried it to California; but what afterwards became of it I do not know.

198 Our road through the Sweet Water valley lay the most of the time close to the river, and it was generally good until we reached South Pass. At that place we reached the highest point on our route, the elevation being seven thousand four hundred and eighty-nine feet above the sea. The atmosphere at this height was so rare that it was difficult for ourselves and our cattle to breathe, and doubly tiresome to march. The combination of varied scenery gave us a grand picture. There is a notch in the snow-capped mountain, a beginning of vegetation lower down, and a graduation of it, until, when we have looked to the foot of the grand old mountains, we could see a growth of heavy timber, magnificent in its growth and venerable in its age. The valley is perhaps three-quarters of a mile wide. The night that we reached the Pass, we camped by the Pacific Springs, and there first saw water that flows into the Pacific Ocean.

We camped earlier than usual to look about. The most of the men took a tramp from the camp, some going in one direction, and some in another, some to look at the valley, and some to look upon and from the mountains. Some of the party saw elk and some saw mountain sheep. Several of the men who had been out together returned to camp in great excitement. They were not frightened, but wild with joy. They had reached a California good enough for them. They had found gold in large quantities. They had filled their pockets with the precious dust, to show to us poor fellows who had been so unfortunate as not to learn the fact so soon as they did. But unfortunately for them, their gold proved to be but mica, a yellow isinglass.

Our first camping ground west of South Pass was sandy, upon the Little Sandy creek, which empties into the Green river. We were there obliged to fill our watersacks with water. These sacks were made of rubber and would hold about twenty-five gallons. They were to be tied at the top like a grain sack. Our next day's tramp was a long and wearisome one. We marched about twenty miles to reach the Big Sandy, which also empties into the Green river. I say we marched; for that we always did. No man could ride, unless unable to walk.