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LIFE SKETCH
OF
PIERRE BARLOW CORNWALL

BY BRUCE CORNWALL, his son

ILLUSTRATED

San Francisco
W. M. Robertson
1906

*A true truly
P. Q. Cornwall*

II

Crossing the Plains

The spirit of the pioneer had already manifested itself strongly in him and when the Federal Government published the account of Fremont's Expedition to California, in 1845-6, a copy was obtained and eagerly perused. It is easy to understand how the remarkable experiences therein related, brought the desire for the great west into the heart and mind of the young man of twenty-six. Here was a chance to retrieve his fortune.

Ever quick to see and take advantage of an opportunity, April, 1848, found him with his younger brother, Arthur Cornwall, then only sixteen, outfitting at St. Joseph, Missouri. The discovery of gold was unknown in the East, and so it was not the lure of mining, but only the strong, earnest desire to push on, to conquer a new country, that inspired these two young men. Horses, provisions, clothing, muskets, rifles (there were no repeating arms), and miscellaneous articles for

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general use and Indian trading, were soon acquired, and one Tom Fallon, woodsman, hunter, scout and freelance, who had already traversed the west, was engaged as guide. Mr. Cornwall carried with him a Bible, a dictionary, an edition of Irish Eloquence, consisting of the speeches of Curran, Grattan, Phillips, and Emmett, and copies of Moore, Byron and Burns.

Thus accoutred, the little party of three, early in April, 1848, left "St. Joe," going by way of Council Bluffs where were encamped some five hundred Oregon immigrants, a most motley company. On the west side of the Missouri River four thousand Mormons, who had been driven out of Nauvoo, Illinois, were gathered under the leadership of Brigham Young. They had sent agents westward to choose a site for settlement, plant corn and prepare for their reception at a place where they hoped to found a nation and be undisturbed. At Council Bluffs they waited for spring to open before they advanced. The Cornwall party, however, were desirous of getting well on their way before the tide of emigration began, for, with the lead maintained, they would have the choice of grass for their animals and camping

spots for themselves. The Oregon immigrants, the first to follow, were not to break camp for some two weeks to come. This was too long to wait, and being joined by Orrin Kellogg, his son Joseph and two young men named Hathaway from Wood County, Ohio, bound for the Willamette Valley, preparation was made for an immediate start.

My father had had intrusted to his care, for preservation and safe transmittal, a Masonic Charter, issued October 19, 1846, by the Grand Lodge of Missouri to Multnomah Lodge, No. 84, of Oregon City. It was on parchment and securely enclosed in a tin cylinder. The Kelloggs, who were strong, able-bodied and -minded men and Masons, formed a welcome addition to the little party, that now increased to seven, with Mr. Cornwall at its head, crossed the river, and began the long march. In Fallon, their guide, they placed great dependence. He was of Scotch-Irish extraction, had been raised in the Hudson Bay Company's service and spoke French, English and many of the Indian dialects fluently. He was courageous and devoted to the interests of the party.

The Oregon trail followed along the South

Platte into the midst of the Pawnee country. These Indians claimed the territory between the Loup Fork of the Platte on the north and the Smoky Hill River on the south, a very wide area. From their villages on the Platte the trail ran southward to their hunting and battle grounds. With the advent of spring it was their custom to separate into small bands and wander about seeking opportunities to rob and murder. No tribe on the continent ever obtained more justly the fear, hatred and contempt of the white man.

About three hundred miles to the westward of their starting point the party met the famous scout, Joe Meek, on his way from Oregon to the Capitol at Washington, in search of Federal aid for the settlers in the first Indian war of the northwest. The story he told of the ferocity of the Indians was not calculated to encourage the emigrants, but they pushed on.

The weather was good; grass, water and game were plentiful and men and horses fared well. All were in high spirits when, without warning, they suddenly rode over a rise of prairie almost in the midst of a camp of two thousand

Pawnees. Within a trice they were surrounded, made prisoners and deprived of their arms.

At sometime when in an unsettled part of the continent, camping and hunting perhaps, or it may be only strolling apart from a summer hotel, have you not stopped in the vastness of the wilderness, beyond all sounds save the roar of a stream, the sighing of the wind and other wood notes to imagine the scroll of time rolled backward, to consider how different your position had you stood there a half century ago? Your senses must have been more keen, your hearing, your sight, your very feeling, more acute then. Every tree and crag and bush was the possible shelter of a savage enemy, stalking quietly about you, hemming you in and abiding the time in suspended, eager joy when you should fall his victim. Instead of the hunter you would have been the hunted and all the chances against you. When you discharged a gun, built a fire or took any forward step you would have known not whether you gave your own death sign. Keen, eager eyes observed you with fatal cunning. That is what it meant to roam this western continent fifty years ago. Peace and goodwill prevail today. Where

now your eye considers the scene for picturesque beauty, it would then have glanced uneasily, warily but keenly to detect danger, conflict, blood and possible death. That is what it meant; that is what worked nerve and alert, masterful power into the survivors of the ordeal—the men who were our fathers.

The white prisoners were in dire distress. Fallon, who could speak the Pawnee dialect, wisely concealed this fact for obvious reasons. For a day and a night and a part of the next day the immigrants were kept under close guard while the Indian chiefs, sitting about in council, smoked and debated as to what disposition should be made of them. Fallon, hearing their speeches, ascertained that the younger braves insisted upon having the lives of the prisoners as a fitting reprisal for those of two Indians of their tribe who had been recently killed at Fort Smith on the Arkansas. The old chiefs spoke against this sanguinary procedure and the council was long and heated in its discussions.

My father, by means of signs, requested to be taken into the circle, where, in the same manner, he attempted to impress the savages

with fear. Colonel Loring's regiment was about to proceed through the country on its way to Salt Lake and Oregon. The Indians sat in dignified silence as the white man conveyed to them the impression that his little band were but the advance couriers of an army of warriors to be likened in numbers only to the leaves on the trees, and that any harm that might befall any of the seven would bring a heavy reckoning upon the Indians; that even further delay would provoke severe punishment. When he had finished, the speaker was led away and the council concluded its deliberations by determining upon the release of the prisoners.

Toward three o'clock in the afternoon of the second day of captivity, the company again took up its march, accompanied by some of the older chiefs who saw it a dozen or so miles under way. That night there was no rest but the immigrants kept steadily on until early morning when they encamped near the Platte. They had not slept long, however, when young Arthur Cornwall, who was on guard, woke them hastily with the news that the Indians were on the opposite bank of the river. In the gray light of the early dawn they

could be seen emerging from behind a low range of bushes, some fifty strong, mounted on their ponies. It was a band of the younger braves in pursuit. Deterred for the time by the wiser counsel of the older chiefs, they had followed hard through the night and now began a running fight which lasted all day.

The Indians were armed principally with bows and arrows and most of the time kept at a considerable distance, fearing the rifles of the white men; but the air was often filled with feathery darts, one of which pierced my father's right leg below the knee, entering the bone and making a serious wound. This was the only injury sustained by the white men, while they had the satisfaction of delaying the pursuit by emptying many of the Indian's saddles.

The Pioneers continued on their way all day and late into the night, when, being still close to the Platte River, they were obliged, through sheer exhaustion, to stop for rest and refreshment. Making what barricade they could of their saddles, they slept undisturbed until dawn when, to their dismay, the Indians were perceived crossing the river. Sixty braves in single file emerged

from the water. This time the party's fate was apparently sealed. Each man realized the desperate character of the position, yet each one was calm, and, speaking in modulated voices one to another, without hesitation, they settled behind their flimsy barricade, grasped their weapons and waited.

After crossing, the Indians trotted forward in single file. The end seemed very near indeed; no one doubted what it was to be. The redmen had approached to within a few hundred yards when suddenly Fallon sprang to his feet, and, standing at his full height on the improvised embankment, shaded his eyes from the rising sun and gazed steadily at the approaching horsemen. In a quick way he then turned to those lying below him grasping their weapons; "Hold hard," he said, "for God's sake." And then, "Boys, I think we're saved." He brought his hand to his mouth and gave an Indian yell which was answered in the same way. The horses were reined, and the Indians seemed puzzled and in doubt. Fallon again shouted, at the same time advancing and two Indians came forward to meet him. He had married a Sioux maiden the autumn before and

this party proved to be a band of Sioux on the warpath against the Pawnees; among them was Fallon's father-in-law, one of their chiefs.

Consider the feelings of those young Pioneers, the relief, the thanksgiving that was theirs. The Indians gathered about them and hearing of the nearness of the Pawnees at once started in pursuit.

That night they again overtook the small party of immigrants and camped with them, loaded down with the spoils of the enemy whom they had met and defeated after a fierce battle. They were naked except for their clouts; their heads were shaved clean save for a band of bristling hair in the center that stood high and extended from their foreheads backward. In all the splendor of their war paint they sat about in buffalo robes, boasting of their deeds of prowess and valor.

Under the escort and protection of these grim allies, the party moved slowly forward, crossing at the north bank of the Platte to Fort Laramie. Here they were overtaken by other immigrants, amongst them "Jeemes" Walker, nephew of the famous Kentucky scout, Joe Walker, with whom

they continued past Fort Laramie, the last post on the eastern side of the Rockies. On they went, hunting buffalo, now and then meeting Indians in skirmish but without loss, finally leaving the Platte and crossing to the valley of the Sweetwater, past Independence Rock, on below the foot of the Big Horns, through Devil's Gate and gradually up and through the historic South Pass.

From this point began the western descent of the Rockies toward the Pacific. For a hundred and twenty miles the country was forbidding until Fort Bridger, a welcome haven of rest and recuperation, was reached. The trail then wound over the elevation between the Bear and Port Neuf Rivers, and at a distance of about thirteen hundred miles from their starting point, the immigrants reached the most important post of Fort Hall. Here flowed the Snake River, the lower arm of the mighty Columbia, and here, a few miles beyond the Fort, at the crossing of the Raft River, the great trail forked, one branch continuing along the Snake River to the northwest and Willamette Valley, the other extending south past Steeple Rock, across the Goose Creek Mountains, on to California.

The original party now divided, the Kelloggs going to Oregon, the Cornwalls to California. The Masonic Charter which he had brought in safety through so many dangers, Mr. Cornwall entrusted to the elder Kellogg who carefully transmitted it to its final destination at Oregon City. There it became, Sept. 11, 1848, the organic instrument of the first Masonic Lodge of the great West, Multnomah Lodge, No. 84, which was opened in the upper part of a rude building, a barrel of flour serving as the stand in the East, a barrel of lime in the West, and a barrel of pork in the South.

Mr. Cornwall had persuaded a number of the Oregon immigrants to divert their route to California and the party that took the southern trail under his leadership numbered not less than forty-five men with their families, livestock and some thirty wagons. This large party moved slowly, and Fallon became restless. With a Scotchman named Guthrie, who had joined them at Fort Hall, he left to proceed more quickly to California. The two were attacked for their supplies by the Hill Indians, and some weeks later