WHAT I SAW IN CALIFORNIA:

BEING THE

JOURNAL OF A TOUR,

BY THE EMIGRANT ROUTE AND SOUTH PASS OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS, ACROSS THE CONTINENT OF NORTH AMERICA, THE GREAT DESERT BASIN, AND THROUGH CALIFORNIA,

IN THE YEARS 1846, 1847.

"ALL WHICH I SAW, AND PART OF WHICH I WAS."—*Dryden.*

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Morris, and Meredith, arrived. The small town seemed to be literally overflowing with strangers of every grade of character and condition of life, collected from all parts of the continents of America and Europe, civilized and uncivilized. On the 4th our additional purchases were made and other arrangements completed, with the exception of some fixtures to our wagon, with duplicate axletrees, ox-bows, &c. &c., which were promised to be in readiness the next morning. From the 5th, therefore, I shall date the commencement of our journey, describing as minutely as will be interesting or useful the events and observations of each day consecutively, from notes taken at the close of our several diurnal marches.

I bespeak the patience of the reader whenever these pages shall appear to him monotonous, as they doubtless frequently will. My design is to give a *truthful* and not an exaggerated and fanciful account of the occurrences of the journey, and of the scenery, capabilities, and general features of the countries through which we shall pass, with incidental sketches of the leading characteristics of their populations. The journey across the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific, is one of protracted duration, owing to the necessarily slow progress of those who undertake it, arising from the numerous difficulties and obstructions they must encounter. The scenery is neither so diversified, nor are the incident and adventure so dramatic and striking as most readers may suppose, from having perused the many unauthenticated histories, fabulous and imaginary, with which the press has of late teemed, professing to be descriptive of mountain and prairie life. The vast interior of North America, with the reputed Eldorado on the shore of the Pacific, furnishes, however, much that is worthy of the inquiry, examination, and admiration of the naturalist, and much that is calculated to awaken and please the desultory curiosity of the mass. Whatever I saw and noted at the time, with the impressions made upon my mind, will be faithfully and truthfully recorded.

CHAPTER II.

Appearance of the country—Vexatious difficulties of starting—First camp—Violent thunder-storm—Four-footed tragedian—First view of the prairies—Soil—Flowers—Emigrant camp—Frontier family—Thunder-storm on the prairie—Lodgings on the frontier—More of the Mormons—Rainbow on the prairies—Indian Creek—Place of organization—Straying of cattle and horses—Election on the prairies—Shawnee Indians.

MAY 5.—The beauties and glories of spring are now unfolding themselves, and earth and sky seem to vie with each other in presenting the most pleasing influences to the eye and upon the sensibilities. Vegetable nature in this region has arrayed herself in a gorgeous garniture, and every object that raises itself above the surface of the ground, is so adorned with verdure and all the variegated and sparkling array of floral coloring, as to challenge the admiration of the most unobservant eye.

Our wagon, which has been in the hands of the smith several days for the purpose of adapting it in all respects to our journey, we expected would be ready early this morning; but when I went to the shop to ascertain if the alterations and fixtures were completed, I found but little done. The smith made his excuses as usual in such cases, but promised to go about the work and finish it immediately. I had learned how to value his promises, and determined not to leave the spot until I saw the work finished. This was done about three o'clock, P. M. Our ox-team, which had been kept in readiness for several hours, was immediately attached to the wagon, and our luggage placed in it with all dispatch, and at four o'clock the wagon and team, under the guidance of Brownell the driver, left the town. Business detaining me a short time, I did not overtake the wagon, until it had "rolled," as the teamster's expression is, about a mile from its starting-point, where I found

it firmly and immoveably stalled in the mud, so far as the power of our team could be considered an agent for its extrication. The oxen being untutored and unmanageable, could not be prevailed upon to unite their strength. I dismounted from my horse, and with the aid of Curry, McKinstry, and Nuttall, endeavored to raise the wheels and thus assist the oxen in their efforts. But all our exertions were vain. Fortunately a negro man with a well-trained yoke of oxen came down the road, while we were thus engaged, and hitching his team to ours the wagon was immediately drawn out of the mud, and, to use a nautical expression, we were "set afloat" again.

Proceeding a mile farther, I determined to encamp for the night, it being nearly sunset, on a small stream which crossed the road. Having selected the site of our camp in a grove near a log-house, the wagon, driven by Brownell, soon came up, but in attempting to cross a causeway thrown over the stream, the wheels ran off on one side, and we were stalled a second time. We were relieved finally from this difficulty by a Santa Fé teamster and his oxen, who came down the road during our labors to extricate the wagon. A Mr. Ross, of Independence, passing at the time, acted as master-teamster on the occasion, and performed his duty to admiration. The oxen seemed willing to obey him, when they would not heed the commands of others. We ascended a small elevation and encamped for the night.

Our provisions and cooking utensils, in the haste of departure, had been packed in the wagon without much regard to convenience, in case we should be obliged to make use of them; and we were consequently compelled to remove many heavy boxes and trunks before arriving at our meal, flour, and bacon, and the pans and dishes of our kitchen and table. Upon a careful inspection, we moreover found that sundry pots, skillets, and frying-pans, which we had specially ordered and paid for, were wanting.

During the process of cooking supper, it commenced raining and blowing with great violence. Our fire was nearly extinguished by the deluge of water from the clouds, and our *dough*

was almost turned to *batter*. Curry, after most persevering and praiseworthy efforts, succeeded in browning the coffee, but Jacob, when he set about grinding it, could not make the coffee-mill perform its appropriate duty, and it was voted a cheat. The rain came down so copiously at last, that our fire was entirely extinguished, and our culinary operations were suspended until nearly 10 o'clock. The violence of the storm abated at that hour. Brownell soon after succeeded in placing before us a supper of half-baked corn-bread, fried bacon, and coffee. We ate standing, with the rain falling, and our clothing completely saturated with water.

Our oxen become entangled in the ropes by which we had secured them from straying during the night, and it was not without much labor and difficulty that they were released. Jacob and myself made our bed, or rather took shelter from the storm, among the boxes in our wagon; McKinstry and Brownell bivouacked under the wagon, and Curry and Nuttall under a large tree. The suspension of the fury of the storm lasted until about 2 o'clock in the morning, when the rain recommenced falling in torrents, accompanied by peals of crashing thunder and flashes of lightning so brilliant, as to illuminate the whole vault of the heavens. Notwithstanding all these inconveniences, we rested pretty well. Distance two miles.

May 6.—The atmosphere was clear and calm, and thousands of birds were chanting their matin hymn, rendering the grove musical with their melodies.

Three Santa Fé wagons which passed our camp last night during the storm, were stalled in the road just beyond us. We purchased some corn for our oxen at the log-dwelling near by, which they devoured with a good appetite, having eaten nothing for about eighteen hours. Our breakfast, which consisted of badly-baked corn-bread, bacon, and coffee, being over, we readjusted the baggage and resumed our journey. Just as we were starting, one of our best oxen having become entangled in the rope by which he was tied, was thrown to the ground with great force, and after struggling some time he rolled up his eyes, which became fixed, and he manifested all the symptoms of

death by a broken neck, or some other fatal injury. The rope was cut, but he was motionless and apparently breathless. Here, as we supposed, was a disaster, stopping further progress until we could supply the place of the dead ox. I was about starting back to town to purchase another animal, when he very calmly and deliberately rose upon his legs, and began to feed upon the corn as composedly as if nothing had occurred. He evidently, after struggling with the rope a long time, thought himself dying, and made signs accordingly.

As we approached what is called the Blue Prairie, the road became much drier and less difficult. The vast prairie itself soon opened before us in all its grandeur and beauty. I had never before beheld extensive scenery of this kind. The many descriptions of the prairies of the west had forestalled in some measure the first impressions produced by the magnificent landscape that lay spread out before me as far as the eye could reach, bounded alone by the blue wall of the sky. No description, however, which I have read of these scenes, or which can be written, can convey more than a faint impression to the imagination of their effects upon the eye. The view of the illimitable succession of green undulations and flowery slopes, of every gentle and graceful configuration, stretching away and away, until they fade from the sight in the dim distance, creates a wild and scarcely controllable ecstasy of admiration. I felt, I doubt not, some of the emotions natural to the aboriginal inhabitants of these boundless and picturesque plains, when roving with unrestrained freedom over them; and careless alike of the past and the future, luxuriating in the blooming wilderness of sweets which the Great Spirit had created for their enjoyment, and placed at their disposal.

The soil of these prairies is of the most inexhaustibly fertile composition, being a black loam, usually several feet in depth. Among the flowers which spangle the waves of this ocean of luxuriant vegetation, were the wild pink-verbena, and the wild indigo, with a blue bean-like blossom. The larkspur, and myriads of smaller flowers, ornament the velvety carpet of grass. Having alighted from my horse to gather some fine specimens

of these flowers, when I was carelessly remounting, encumbered with my gun and several other articles, the saddle turned, and my horse becoming restive or alarmed, threw me with great violence to the ground. My wrist and both shoulders were much injured, and my right side was severely bruised.

At two o'clock we reached an encampment, composed of the wagons of Colonel Russell and the family of Mr. West, of Calloway county, Mo., and some others. They were emigrating to California. The wagons numbered in all about fifteen. When our wagon arrived it was drawn up alongside the others, and our oxen released to feed upon the grass of the prairie. I visited the tents of our fellow-travellers, and found the ladies busily employed, as if sitting by the fireside which they had recently left for a long and toilsome, if not a dangerous journey, and a country of which they knew but little. Mrs. West, a lady of seventy, and her daughter, Mrs. Campbell, were knitting. Mr. West, the head of his family, was originally from Virginia, and was, he told me, seventy-five years of age. His four sons and son-in-law, Major Campbell, having determined to emigrate to California, he and his wife had resolved to accompany them. Mr. and Mrs. W., although so much advanced in life, appeared to be as resolute as the youngest of their family, and to count with certainty upon seeing the Eldorado of the Pacific. The former realized this expectation, the latter did not.

A log-house, the residence of a Mr. Milliron, an emigrant to this country from Virginia, was situated about half a mile from our encampment. We visited this house soon after we encamped. The family, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. M. and several sons and daughters, have resided here, on the outskirts of civilization, four years. They have annually been afflicted with the prevailing sickness of the country, (the fever and ague,) except their eldest daughter, a very fair-skinned, handsomely-featured and graceful young woman. In a field not far from the house, one of the sons of Mr. M., with a horse-team, was plowing up the ground. I followed the plow several times backwards and forwards, and I never saw a soil indicative of a higher degree of fatness, or more productive qualities.

About five o'clock, P. M., a very black and threatening cloud, which had been gathering for some hours in the west, rose over us, and discharged rain with the copiousness of a water-spout, accompanied with brilliant and incessant flashes of lightning, and crashing peals of thunder. The scene, during the violence of the storm, was inexpressibly grand. I had never previously witnessed any meteoric displays comparable with it. The storm continuing after dark, we determined to shelter ourselves in the house for the night.

A good supper of fried bacon, eggs, fresh butter, and hot corn-bread and biscuit, with a cup of coffee, was prepared for us, to the merits of which we did ample justice. I met at the supper-table a traveller named O'Bryant. He was a young man, and last from Santa Fé, bound for Independence. He had been absent from the United States six years, during which time, impelled by the spirit of adventure and the temptations of gain, he had visited Santa Fé, Chihuahua, Mexico, the mines of Sonora, and the country of Lower California. He could, however, give us no information respecting the route we were about to travel.

The capacity of the log-house in which we had taken lodgings for the night, was confined to two small rooms; and of men, women, and children, all counted, there were some fifteen persons to be accommodated. But this, singular as it may seem to the uninitiated in frontier life, was done to the perfect satisfaction and comfort of all concerned. Such are the inventions of necessity, and so soon do our real wants and comforts overshadow and annihilate the artificial desires and luxuries of civilization to which we have been accustomed. I retired early, but the feverish and painful sensations produced by the injuries of the morning, together with the exciting impressions upon my imagination made by the remarkable aspect of the country through which we had travelled, prevented sleep. We were now on the line which divides savage life and civilization. A few miles further, and we shall pass beyond the incorporated territories of the United States into the countries inhabited by the untutored tribes of the wilderness. But notwithstanding

such is our position, the scenery around us presents greater pastoral charms than I have witnessed in the oldest and most densely populated districts of the United States; houses alone are wanting to render the landscape perfect. It would seem as if in mockery of the puny efforts and circumscribed results of the labors of man to ornament the landscape by art and cultivation, the power and taste of Omnipotence had here been manifested, preparing for his children a garden as illimitable in extent as it is perfect, grand, and picturesque in appearance. Distance 10 miles.

May 7.—A rainbow formed a perfect and brilliant arch in the west, as the sun rose above the eastern horizon. A black curtain of clouds shaded the entire heavens, with the exception of a narrow fringe of yellow light above the far-off green undulations to the east. The impending masses of watery vapor soon, however, shut down, and closing this, the whole heavens were shrouded in deep gloom.

The rain fell almost incessantly during the night, accompanied by loud and continual peals of thunder, and flashes of lightning so vivid as to illuminate the apartment in which we slept, through the unchinked crevices between the logs. During these fierce bursts of the storm, I could not but sympathize with my fellow-travellers without, with no shelter but the thin covering of their tent-cloths, and no floor to rest upon but the wet, cold ground. Such are the exposures of the western emigrants.

We resumed our march in the rain, at 9 o'clock, accompanied by Colonel Russell and his wagon, leaving the other wagons encamped where we found them. We travelled about four miles to a small creek which is called "Blue Creek," and finding the waters so much swollen by the late heavy rains, that it was not fordable, we encamped in a narrow, timbered bottom, a hundred yards from the stream. About twelve o'clock the dark masses of clouds which had obscured the heavens, and poured out upon the earth such floods of water, cleared away, and the sun shone out warm and bright. We took advantage of this interregnum in the water dynasty to dry our drenched