

[Mr. Thornton and wife left Quincy, Illinois for Independence, Missouri on April 18, 1846. On May 15, a day or two from Independence, they joined a party under Col. W. H. Russell. That night a count was taken showing the following in the party: wagons, 72; men, 130; women, 65; children, 125; breadstuff, 69,420 lbs.; bacon, 40,200 lbs.; powder, 1100 lbs.; lead, 2672 lbs.; guns, mostly rifles, 155; pistols, 104; cattle and horses, estimated at 710.]

85 June 18.—We resumed our journey in search of a ford, Mr. Hall, however, affirming that it was "to head the Nebraska." At 10 o'clock A. M., we arrived at a place, where, upon examination, it was believe the receding of the waters would enable us to ford on the following day. It was therefore determined to remain in camp. The day was warm and clear. The road over which we passed was generally quite level and hard, and there was an abundance of good grass upon the plain, on the side of the river upon which we had pitched our tents. The hills came down to the river on the opposite side; showing, however, a break or opening through a narrow valley into the countyr in the rear and westward.

Mrs. Thornton and myself were quite unwell. She appeared to be in great danger of sinking under the fatigues and exposures incident to the journey.

In the evening, the Rev. J. A. Cornwall married Mr. Morgan Savage to Miss Dunbar, and Mr. Henry Croiyers to Miss Mary Hall.—(Mercury at sunrise, 58°; sunset, 72°.)

June 19.—In the morning, a very black cloud formed in the northwest, along which the lightning forked, portending for some time a severe storm. It passed away, however, in a short time; after which a brilliant bow appeared.

86 The wagon beds were raised about ten inches, by putting blocks under them, for the purpose of rendering them in some measure water-proof. We at length commenced crossing the river, which was here about a mile and a half wide; but it was necessary to proceed diagonally, so that the actual distance across became two miles. All was finally conveyed over without any material accident. It became necessary to take some of the dogs into the wagons to prevent them from drowning. We encamped upon the west side, where there was much sand and gravel, little grass, many rattlesnakes, and lizards without number.—(Mercury at sunrise, 63°; sunset, 71°.)

June 20.—Mrs. Thornton became at length so ill that she could with difficulty leave her bed, although her accustomed energy of purpose induced her still to undertake services for which her strength and health were manifestly unequal.

I have already remarked that the south branch of the Nebraska, at the place at which we crossed it, was one mile and a half wide. I omitted, however, to observe that it had a quicksand bottom, and that it was necessary therefore to avoid stopping the teams in the river, because when this was done, the wagons immediately commenced sinking.

From the observations I made, at different places along this stream, and judging likewise from all that I was able to learn from others, this is one of the characteristics of the stream, to its junction with the north branch, which Colonel Fremont places in latitude 41°, 5', 5", and longitude, by chronometer and lunar distances, 100°, 49', 43", and thence to its junction with the Missouri, distant three hundred and fifteen miles, and which, according to the same gentleman, is in latitude 41°, 8', 24", north, and longitude 95°, 20', west.

The water is yellow and muddy, in consequence of the limestone and marly formation of a portion of the



87 country through which it flows. Mr. John Torrey, in the preface to his catalogue of plants, collected by Colonel Fremont, in his expedition to the Rocky Mountains, says, "The valley of this river (the Nebraska) from its mouth to the great forks, is about four miles broad and three hundred and fifteen miles long. It is rich, well timbered, and covered with luxuriant grasses. The purple *liatris scariosa*, and several asters, were here conspicuous features of vegetation. I was pleased to recognize among the specimens collected near the forks, the fine large-flowered *Asclepias* that I described many years ago, in my account of James' Rocky Mountain plants, under the name of *A. speciosa*, and which Mr. Geyer also found in Nicolet's expedition. It seems to be the plant subsequently described and figured by Sir W. Hooker, under the name of *A. douglasii*."

The morning was cool and cloudless, and the atmosphere in the distance among the hills appeared to be smoky, rendering it probable that the Indians had permitted fire to get out. As we were preparing to "catch up," a cloud of dust was seen rising in the distance upon the plain on the right bank of the river. It was soon ascertained that a vast herd of bisons were coming to water in dense masses down from the plains and the hills beyond. The most of them, however, scented us, or at length saw us, and turned so as ultimately to reach the stream some distance lower down. Yet some of them were not to be thus balked, and came boldly down to the watering, but there was a good mile and a half between them and our rifles.

I have omitted to remark that we every day had a "noon halt" of about one hour for the purpose of re-  
88 freshing the cattle with water and grass, where they were to be had, and at least to rest them and to take a little food ourselves. And I will now mention that we continued to do this where and when it was practicable, until upon a subsequent portion of our journey it became necessary to confine ourselves to a very small allowance of food.

We resumed our journey from the place where we crossed the south branch of the Nebraska, about 7 o'clock A. M., and pursued our way up a deep and dry channel, down which had swept the torrents from the hills and plains above. After traveling about three miles we reached a high, open, and rolling, or rather hilly prairie, presenting a very desolate and forbidding aspect. Much of the way was sandy, and in some places we saw immense numbers of lizards. We traveled twenty miles, and encamped about sunset on the north branch of the Nebraska. During the afternoon I saw a plant growing very abundantly, which in many respects resembled buckwheat. It was about one foot high. The stems on which the leaves grew, started out from a common stalk near the ground, and spread out. The flowers were in large clusters upon a stalk, shooting up from the center, and some of them of a straw-color, while others were pink, and some white. Many persons in camp were quite unwell, and so many of them had been so during the previous ten days, that it was suspected we had been traveling over an unhealthy region.

The water of the north branch of the Nebraska was more discolored than even that of the south branch. Indeed, it appeared to be loaded with rolling sands, as the Missouri is with mud. I observed in the distance  
89 hills which presented the appearance of strata of marl, not unlike the white chalky or marly looking hills mentioned as having been seen on the east side of the stream; and it is from formations of this character, probably, that the Nebraska derives its discoloration. I have no means of determining the distance from this camp to the junction of the two streams. Both are broad, shallow, muddy, and unnavigable. The land between the streams at their junction, is a low, fertile prairie extending eighteen miles west, where the hills come down to it, at a place at which it is five and a half miles wide. The soil on both sides is sufficiently fertile, tolerably well supplied with grass, but almost wholly destitute of timber. The low lands in many places show a white efflorescence of salt; and the country in the prospect is broken, barren, and naked. Herds of bisons frequent many portions of the region; and savages, cruel, treacherous, and cunning, hang upon the rear of these roving bands, or hover around the emi-



grant's encampment, at night, like wolves prowling about the fold of the flock.

90 The main stream immediately below the union of the two principal branches, was measured by Colonel Fremont, and found to be 5350 feet wide. There are said to be many large islands in the main stream, well supplied with timber, having a good soil, and the most of them above the annual rise. There is no timber upon the bottom lands on each side of the main stream, except a few groves near the river. The bottoms are generally high, and not very well supplied with grass, while other portions, which are low, and probably overflow every spring, have an abundance of the most healthy and delicious food for cattle. The river is generally three-fourths of a mile wide, although in many places it is much more; and in its general appearance and characteristics, if we except its depth, it resembles the Missouri so "reeking rich" with mud.

It is probable that no part of the valley through which it flows affords timber sufficient to sustain any thing like an extensive settlement. A settlement and military post could be established with advantage at Grand Island, but it is not probable that it could be done at any other locality below the encampment of this date.-- (Mercury at sunrise, 65°; sunset, 71°.)

June 21.--Sabbath.--We traveled over the most dreary country we had previously seen. The loose and hot sands were blown about in a manner the most distressing to the mouth, nostrils, eyes, and ears. Toward the close of the afternoon, nature wore a more inviting and pleasing aspect. We found good grass for the cattle, and an abundance of drift-wood for culinary purposes.

91 The day had been clear and hot; and although the winds were high, yet they were as warm as though they had become heated by passing over a sandy region. At sunset they died away, and there seemed not to be even a zephyr to ripple the smooth surface of the stream. A bank of dark clouds began before night to be heaped up in the west. In about two hours they gradually rose, the front leading the way toward the east, until the heaviest and darkest masses appeared to be over our heads; when the most tremendous winds burst in a moment upon the stillness, followed almost immediately by flashes of lightning that, for the time, blasted the sight, crashes of thunder that deafened the ears, and torrents of rain that deluged the hills with a flood descending in roaring and foaming torrents, that threatened to submerge the plain below. During the space of half an hour the clouds hurled their red-hot thunderbolts along the sky, and so thickly through the atmosphere, that it presented a continued and lurid glare of light, which gave a fierce and appalling aspect to the descending waters and the surrounding darkness. The thunderbursts became at length more distant, and less distinct, until they passed far away to the east in low and almost inaudible mutterings. The stars appeared one after another in all their accustomed brilliancy, and the scene, from being one of awful and terrible sublimity, became indescribably beautiful.--(Mercury at sunrise, 65°; sunset, 70°.)

June 22.--Several persons were ill in camp, yet not confined to their wagons. Mrs. Thornton and myself were among the number. The day was cool and clear, and the wind somewhat boisterous. We traveled until a little before sunset, over a very sandy road, and through a country that appeared to be very arid and uninteresting. We saw, however, some fine trees at a distance from our road, on the left. We encamped at length on a very beautiful prairie, having excellent grass, and a large spring of clear water in the midst of it.

Mr. Lard had left one of his dogs on the right bank of the south branch of the Nebraska, on the forenoon of the 19th. Poor Jowler finding himself abandoned by his friends--if that is not a misnomer--had sat down upon the bank of the stream, and howled most piteously, and so loud that he was distinctly heard by us across the stream, which



92 was there one mile and a half wide. Finding that he would not be sent for, he had swum the river, having been four days without food.--(Mercury at sunrise, 65°; at sunset, 68°).

June 23.--The morning was foggy. We resumed our journey, however, at the usual hour, 7 o'clock. Proceeding along in front of the wagons, I observed my grayhond, Prince Darco, and Jowler, exchanging morning salutations; and I noticed that Darco did not express himself in the frigid formalities of well-bred dogs of the "fashionable world," where one thing is said while another thing is meant; but he gave his old traveling companion a warm and cordial greeting that came up from the bottom of his heart, equivalent to a right "Good morning, Jowler, I am glad to see you." This was, indeed, very clearly expressed in that peculiar wag of the tail, and the inimitable twist which he was wont to give to his neck and head, as he opened his great jaws, and thrust out his long tongue to lick the corner of his mouth, whenever he wished to testify his joy upon first meeting me in the morning.

Jowler, by a slight inclination of the head to the side upon which Prince Darco came up, and by slowly working the ears backward and forward, followed by a sluggish shake, as though they were being bitten by fleas, intimated that he was in good health, but that he felt very weak in consequence of his recent long abstinence from food.

"I observe," said Darco, "that you look very pale in the face."

93 "Yes, I am so weak that it is with great difficulty I can bark. I very much regret that I was so very unwise as to leave a comfortable kennel, well provided with an abundance of clean straw for a bed, and where I never lacked for a plenty of good flesh to eat, to follow my master into a country where I shall perhaps be without a kennel, and probably have nothing better than a dry bone to pick."

Here Jowler set up a most mournful howl; and although being behind, and the dust at the time flying in my face, I can not affirm with truth that I saw him shed tears, yet he may have done so. Indeed, I felt the water come into my own eyes. Darco, however, resumed--

. . . . .

95 We proceeded until half an hour before sunset, when we encamped for the night in an open grassy plain, on the right of the road, and in sight of the celebrated Chimney Rock, which had been in view since the afternoon of the 22d.

Some of our party, proceeded on in advance of the teams, a little to the left of the way, for the purpose of examining this rock, which appeared to be not more than two miles distant. They had desired me to accompany them, but this I declined doing, because I had observed a remarkable peculiarity in the atmosphere during the twenty-four hours preceding, which made it impossible for me to judge with any tolerable degree of accuracy as to the distance of objects, which though they appeared to be comparatively near, yet required some hours to reach. They accordingly set off without me. After dark they returned to camp, being guided back by the light of our fires, and stated that when they turned back, they did not appear to be nearer the rock than they were at noon.

96 Mrs. Thornton and myself were quite unwell at the close of the day. Indeed, we had been seldom otherwise since our first coming upon the waters of the Nebraska. This I was inclined to believe was owing to the mixed salts with which the earth was every where impregnated, which must have imparted their qualities to the water. In all places where there was any soil the greater part of which was not sand, I had observed a white efflorescence of salts. In many places where the ground was cracked, I observed large crystals formed on both sides



of the opening. Some of these I examined with great care, and found the crystals to extend down on both sides quite to the bottom of the opening. I also remarked that these seemed to be large, somewhat impure and discolored, while those upon the surface of the ground, usually found in low places, were small and white, looking very much like fine table-salt, and tasting, as I imagine this would, if compounded with glauber-salts, alum and magnesia.

The day had been clear and warm; but toward evening clouds presented themselves in a variety of forms. Sometimes they appeared in detached masses; at others they rolled up from behind the western horizon, black, and portentous. At length clouds having thin, feathery edges, thickening fast as they extended back, and presenting a black mass of an angry appearance, formed suddenly, and extended rapidly, passing off to the southeast, in low, sullen growls. These were succeeded by others, more threatening, ponderous, and black; having immense heads, and huge aerial forms, piled upon and writhing around each other. These, too, passed off to the southeast, with low rumbling sounds; while the forked lightning gleamed in the main body of the threatening mass.

97 The shades of evening at length closed in, and there seemed to be a probability that we would have a pleasant night. About 11 o'clock, however, a cloud appeared in the northwest, which hung about the edge of the horizon for some time, black, heavy, and ominous. It finally began to move, grew larger, increased in velocity, as it flung out heavy folds, and at length reached the zenith. Cloud warred upon cloud; the "live thunder" leaped from one side of the heavens to the other, with a rapidity and crashing that seemed to rend sky and earth; while torrents of living fire descended, and ran like shining serpents along the ground.

I observed, during the day, the wild sage, or *Artemisia*, growing in many places.-- (Mercury at sunrise, 66°; sunset, 70°.)

98

June 24.

The morning was clear and pleasant, and nature appeared to be refreshed by the rain of the previous night. We started later than usual, not breaking up our encampment until 8 o'clock. Our friends of the Chimney Rock party of yesterday again set off, and about 11 o'clock arrived at the object of their pursuit.

I can not satisfactorily explain the remarkable deception as to distances. The following may account for it, in part, at least. The rays of light passing through a rare medium into a denser one, cause objects seen in the latter, by a person standing in the former, to appear to the eye not in their natural or real position, but raised above it to a height proportioned to the density of the medium in which it is situated; as a coin thrown in a basin of water will appear elevated above its true position. It, probably, in its general principles, is the same phenomenon that is known as the mirage, by which the traveler across the desert, who longs for water, "as the hart panteth for the water-brook," is cheated into a delusive hope, by imagining that he perceives before him lakes, reflecting from their clear and smooth surfaces, trees, plants, rocks, and hills.

99 The same phenomenon is very frequently observed in other circumstances. An example of this, at once curious and instructive, was observed by Dr. Vince, at Ramsgate, which is mentioned in the Penny Magazine, Jan. 1834. Between that place and Dover, there is a hill,  $\beta$  over which the tops of the four turrets of Dover Castle are usually visible at Ramsgate. But, on this occasion, Dr. Vince not only saw the turrets but the whole of the castle, which appeared as if it had been removed, and planted on the side of the hill next to Ramsgate; and rising as much above the hill on that side as it actually was on the other. And this image of the castle



was so strong and well defined, that the hill itself did not appear through it. It should be observed that there is almost six miles of sea between Ramsgate and the land from which the hill rises, and about an equal distance from thence to its summit, and that the height of the eye above the sea, in this observation, was about seventy feet.

Sometimes the images of the mirage are represented as being upon the same plane with the original object. They usually, however, present the appearance of one object above another, sometimes in their natural position, sometimes inverted, sometimes doubled, trebled, or even quadrupled; and sometimes more or less elongated.

The Specter of the Brocken, which for so many years was the terror of the superstitious, and the wonder of the scientific, is a phenomenon of the same general character.

100 The principle upon which they are all dependent, is thus explained in the article already referred to: "Whenever a ray of light strikes obliquely a medium less refracting than that in which it was previously moving, it is turned back into the original medium, and a direction is given to it precisely similar to that which would have been the result of a reflection taking place at the common surface of two mediums. Now, the sand of the desert, or the surface of the sea, being heated by the rays of the sun, communicates a portion of its warmth to the stratum of air immediately superposed, which then dilates, and becomes consequently less dense, and therefore less refracting, than the superior strata. In this state of things, when an observer regards an object a little elevated above the horizon, the rays, which, in coming to him, traverse a layer of air of uniform density, will exhibit it in the natural position, while the light directed obliquely toward the surface of the earth, will be bent downward, and so come to the eye as if from an object placed inversely and below the former. This explains the inverted image below the object; but our limits will not allow us to apply the principle to a detailed explanation of all the forms of the phenomenon which we have stated. We must, therefore, content ourselves with saying that our knowledge respecting the subject is, that these effects result from a partial alteration in the density of the atmosphere, and the universal operations to which the light is subjected in coming to the eye. It is not necessary that the alteration should be a decrease of density, since, as the two opposite states of the atmosphere produce the same effects, the mirage at sea is often occasioned by the increase of density in the lower stratum of the atmosphere, from the quantity of water which it holds in solution."

101 Colonel J. C. Fremont ascertained that a position occupied by him, Sept. 5, 1842, on the right bank of the Nebraska, six miles above Chimney Rock, was in latitude  $41^{\circ}, 43', 36''$ , N. This nearly ascertains the latitude of this celebrated rock. The name indicates its general appearance, looking as it does, like a vast chimney, or shot tower. It consists of marl and earthy limestone, which is the prevailing formation of the surrounding country; and it has been worked into its present curious shape by the continued action of the winds and rains, which have, within a few years, reduced its height from five hundred feet to about two hundred. It is situated about two miles to the left of the road, as the emigrant proceeds westward; and about twenty-five or thirty miles from our encampment of the evening of the 22d. The action of the wind and rain upon the soft marly formation of the country presents some very curious and interesting objects, which, seen in the distance, are remarkable imitations of magnificent works of art partially in ruins. One of these, called the Court House, was in full view during the afternoon of Monday. It had the appearance of a vast edifice, with its roof fallen in, the great door-ways partially obstructed, some of the window spaces filled with rubbish, and many of the arches broken and fallen, while others seemed to remain as perfect as if they had really been built thousands of years ago, by a people who have



perhaps gone down into the vortex of revolutions; the last page of whose history has been given to the winds, leaving no trace of their existence, save these remains of architectural grandeur and magnificence, that now lift up their heads amid surrounding desolation; befitting monument of man's passing glory, and of the vanity of his hopes.

Far off to the left of the plains between Chimney

- 102 Rock and Scott's Bluff, were many views of remarkable and picturesque beauty, owing their origin to the effect of the winds and rains upon the same peculiar formation. The bluffs presented the appearance of the ruins of some vast ancient city. In one locality, there could be no difficulty in recognizing a royal bath. In the immediate vicinity, there was a vast amphitheater, having upon one side an excavation like an immense niche, with a platform before it, supported by pillars. Here it was imagined that the monarch might have sat upon his throne, surrounded by obsequious courtiers and servile slaves, while the life blood of men better than himself was being shed to make him a holiday; and while, it might have been, loud shouts and plaudits rent the air, he enjoyed the spectacle as one of rich and rare interest. Not far away, we saw what appeared to be a splendid mausoleum, where the noble ashes of his royal ancestors slept. Towering above all, was the temple of Belus, with its stairs ascending around a gradually diminished surface. Here I saw the old palace; there, the new one. In front of one of them I saw the towers that stood on either side of the entrance to the tunnel under the river connecting the two. Near at hand were the celebrated hanging gardens, considerable portions of them remaining in a tolerable state of preservation, and showing in many places hardy shrubs, that, having sent down their long roots into the partial opening of the supporting arches, still smiled in beautiful green, amid general desolation. Numerous streets, having on each side magnificent buildings and lofty domes, sublime in their dimensions and proportions, and beautiful in the outline and details of their architecture, extended far away, so that their remote ends
- 103 were lost in the distance. A fortification, large enough to contain the army with which Napoleon invaded Russia, showed enormous bastions, frowning in massive strength, while the workmanship of its domes, parapets, and minarets presented a very remarkable fullness of detail. Away to the west stood a long line of the wall of the city, with its yet remaining battlements, towers, and loop-holes; mid-way was the vast arch, beneath which flowed the river, through the midst of the city, until turned by Cyrus the Great into a new channel, where it still flows, at the farther side of the plain, spread out in broad, shallow, and turbid streams, that sluggishly creep along among the sand-bars of what was the Euphrates once, but which is the Nebraska now.

- Upon approaching still nearer, the mind was filled with strange images and impressions. The silence of death reigned over a once populous city, which had been a nursery of the arts and sciences, and the seat of a great inland commerce. It was a Tadmor of the Desert, in ruins. No signs of life were visible; a whole people were extinct. The imagination wandered back. The city had fallen into the hand of a beleaguering and sanguinary foe. No quarter had been given; citizen and soldier, old man and matron, young man and maiden, young children and helpless infants, had all fallen victims to a spirit of revenge and retaliation, and to a thirst for gold, and all the worst passions of the human heart. The evening succeeding the day of undistinguishing slaughter and outpouring blood, was one which the ascending fires made terribly sublime. The flames had spread, and in a few brief but dreadful hours, wrapped temple and dome, the palaces of the royal,
- 104 the mansions and pavilions of the rich, and the cottages and hovels of the poor, in one vast sheet of consuming fire, that licked up the very dust of her thousand streets. Many multitudes, perhaps, in attempting to escape from the city, had been slain by their pursuers, who had heaped up their bodies in promiscuous masses about the gates; and under those very walls which still withstood the power of time through a long series of ages. In one day, the anxious crowds of citizens, and the untold thousands of contending soldiers, were swept away by a slaughtering foe, who had left none to



bewail the dead, or to gather from beneath the ruins the bones of those who had perished in sanguinary conflict.

My imagination being thus excited by the remarkable and picturesque views presented to me, in shapes which the action of the wind and rains had wrought in the soft marly formation of the country, I permitted it to wander at will, and to fill the mind with images and scenes, such as I have described. But it being reported to me, by Albert, my ox driver, that one of the wheels of my wagon was making a most terrible groaning for grease, I was brought down from my celestial aerie with such force, upon vulgar realities, as not only made me feel very much ashamed, but broke both wings of my imagination, and, indeed, every bone in them, beside so soiling my feathers, and otherwise so seriously injuring me, that I have at best been but a limping bird ever since.

105 Col. Fremont, in his Journal, under date July 14, 1842, speaks of appearances somewhat similar, at a place known as Goshen's Hole, where the geological formation is like that of the Court House, the Chimney Rock, and the locality  $\phi$  I have just described, and to which I have given the name of "The City of the Desert."

106 "The fork on which we encamped," says he, "appeared to have followed an easterly direction up to this place; but here it makes a very sudden bend to the north, passing between two ranges of precipitous hills, called, as I was informed, Goshen's Hole. There is somewhere in or near this locality a place so called, but I am not certain that it was the place of our encampment. Looking back upon the spot, at the distance of a few miles to the northward, the hills appear to shut in the prairie, through which runs the creek, with a semi-circular sweep which, might very naturally be called a hole in the hills. The geological composition of the ridge is the same which constituted the rock of the Court House and Chimney, on the north fork, which appeared to me a continuation of this ridge. The winds and rains work this formation into a variety of singular forms. The pass into Goshen's Hole is about two miles wide, and the hill on the western side imitates, in an extraordinary manner, a massive, fortified place, with a remarkable fullness of detail. The rock is marl and earthy limestone, white, without the least appearance of vegetation, and much resembles masonry, at a little distance; and here it sweeps around a level area, two or three hundred yards in diameter, and in the form of a half moon, terminating on either end in enormous bastions. Along the whole line of the parapets appear domes and slender minarets, forty or fifty feet high, giving it every appearance of an old fortified town. On the waters of White River, where this formation exists in great extent, it presents appearances which excite the admiration of the solitary traveler, and form a frequent theme of their conversation, when speaking of the wonders of the country. Sometimes it offers the perfectly illusive appearance of a large city, with numerous streets and magnificent buildings, among which the Canadians never fail to see their cabaret; and sometimes it takes the form of a solitary house, with many large chambers, into which they drive their horses at night, and sleep in these natural defenses perfectly secure from any attack of prowling savages. Before reaching our camp at Goshen's Hole, in crossing the immense detritus at the foot of the Castle Rock, we were involved amid winding passages cut by the waters of the hill; and where, with a breadth scarcely large enough for the passage of a horse, the walls rise thirty and forty feet perpendicular."

Some of the hills far off to our left, beyond the bluffs I have been describing, appeared to have a few trees, which I thought were cedars. A fine large ~~ant~~ bison was killed by one of the party. They did not appear to be numerous in this region. We were under the necessity of using the bois de vache almost exclusively after leaving the south branch of the Nebraska. Previous to that time we had usually been able to procure dry sod, or to have wood by carrying it half a day or a day. The weather was



warm, pleasant and clear. The road not so sandy as was usual after leaving the south branch.--(Mercury at sunrise, 64°; sunset, 72°.)

107 June 25. We left the north branch of the Nebraska, and wound round into a little valley presenting more of the extraordinary bluffs before described and characterized by the same general appearance of the ruins of numerous edifices, sometimes washed by the rains and winds into the most fantastic shapes. We saw a species of insect here in great numbers which was new to us, and which is known among the emigrants as the sand-cricket, from the circumstance of their being usually found in sandy and arid districts. They were however really a sort of grasshopper. It is black, thick, and short, about thrice the weight of the hearth-cricket. (About 2 o'clock we found a little rainwater in a ravine. We encamped at a place known as Scott's Bluff. At this place are two small springs of excellent water, one of them is under a high hill, where the emigrant road crossed the head of a small ravine. The other is better, more abundant, but one mile farther on, and at the head of a very deep ravine. We also had an abundance of cedar wood here, which grew in the ravine last mentioned. Indeed, the whole plain was covered with dry cedars, which a tremendous flood is reported to have brought down from the Black Hills about ten years before.)

108 The water and grass at Scott's Bluff were good and abundant. The soil of the country after leaving the south branch of the Nebraska being generally very sandy, and much more sterile than that along the main stream below the confluence of the branches, we had had comparatively little grass for our cattle, and had been compelled to use the bois de vache for fuel. The grass upon the upper prairie had generally been either entirely wanting, or else its growth had been thin, yellow, and poor; and it was only in spots far separated, and upon low grounds along the streams, that we had ever found it at all abundant. Although the valley of the north branch of the Nebraska, up to where we then were, has a variable width of from one to six or seven miles, it would be a great mistake to imagine that, being low, it was well supplied with grass.

The place known as Scott's Bluff is an escarpment of the river, about nine hundred yards in length, rising boldly and in many places even perpendicularly from the water; rendering it necessary for the emigrant road to make a considerable detour to the left. It derives its name from the following circumstances:--

A party of Rocky Mountain trappers in the employment of the American Fur Company, under the command of a celebrated leader named Scott, was returning to St. Louis, in boats down the Nebraska. The water continued to shoal so much as to render it impracticable to proceed in this manner beyond the point on the river opposite to this place. Scott was sick and helpless, and was abandoned in the boat by his companions who, upon arriving at St. Louis reported that he had died, and that they had buried him upon the bank of the Nebraska. Some time in the following year a party found the dead body of a man wrapped in blankets, which the clothing and papers about it, proved conclusively to be that of the unhappy trapper; who, after being abandoned by his inhuman companions to perish, had so far recovered as to be able to leave the boat, and wander into these bluffs, where a more speedy death at the hands of the savages awaited him, or one more lingering by famine.

109 I saw here the wild wormwood tree, as also a species of the cactus which was new to me. It sent out leaves from near the ground, and around a common center. They enlarged and spread out, each being about fourteen inches long, three inches wide, and half an inch thick, with a smooth, velvet-green surface; having irregular edges armed with hard prickles about one inch in length. From the center a very straight green stalk, about half an inch in diameter, rose about eight inches above the leaves, and was crowned with a white flower, in shape and size very like that known in our American gardens as the snowball.



A beautiful white flower resembling the poppy grew here, upon a low plant, the leaves of which were armed with prickles. Black currants were abundant and pleasant to the taste. Cherries grew wild, but were small and bitter. I also saw a sort of pea, which tasted like the garden pea, and very much resembled it both in the appearance of the plant itself, and in that of the fruit. The hill sides were in many places covered with a species of mountain moss. Upon the high bluffs between our encampment and the river many Rocky Mountain sheep were seen. Antelope were also numerous. Prince Darce contrived to pick up one. Some of the hills had many cedars growing upon them, while others were naked.

A gun having been fired for some purpose near the camp, the report echoed and re-echoed several times. I retired to a place near three-fourths of a mile in another direction for the purpose of making the experiment unobserved.

Dark clouds were now sweeping along above the summits of the lofty hills, and some pattering drops of rain began to fall in the valley while the thunder rolled through the black and dense masses of vapor in tones of deep and solemn grandeur.--(Mercury at sunrise, 64°, sunset, 72°.)

110 June 26.--The morning was clear and cool, the wind blowing a gale from the west. Mrs. Thornton, who was, however, still suffering from ill health, with the aid of some of her female companions, ascended one of the very high bluffs from the top of which she had a fine view of the country, and of the north branch of the Nebraska, beyond Chimney Rock. The country over which we traveled was generally ascending, and presented a most barren aspect and painful sameness. The day was warm, and had it not been for a stiff breeze into which the gale of the morning had subsided, the heat would have been very oppressive. At 10 o'clock we found rain-water for the cattle. About an hour before sunset we encamped near the margin of the river, at some distance from the road, at a place from which it was difficult for the cattle to go down to the water. The evening was pleasant, and the winds were high during the night.--(Mercury at sunrise, 63°; sunset, 69°.)

June 27.--At noon we halted to rest in a little ravine, where we had good water, but very little grass. We resumed our journey, after our noon halt, somewhat refreshed and proceeding on over a sandy and desolate country, encamped an hour before sunset upon the banks of a small stream, lightly timbered, and within ten miles of Fort Laramie. The marl and earthy limestone formation of the region through which we had been traveling for some time, had disappeared, and we had instead of a grayish white limestone, which sometimes contained hornstone. I also saw some fine grained granitic sandstone.

111 A company of travelers, consisting of persons of both sexes, some of whom were from Oregon and some from California, returning to the States, were encamped upon a plain about a mile distant. They presented a very woebegone appearance; and brought us, moreover, an evil report of those lands. The Californians affirmed that the country was wholly destitute of timber, and that wheat could not be raised in sufficient quantities for bread; that they had spent all their substance, and were now returning to commence the world anew, somewhere in the vicinity of their former homes.

Among the Oregonians was a Mr. McKissick, an old gentleman, suffering from blindness caused by the dust of the way, when he first emigrated into Oregon. He was now being taken back to the States, with the hope that something might be done to restore his sight.--(Mercury at sunrise, 62°; sunset, 67°.)

June 28.--Sabbath.--We set off for Fort Laramie at about 7 o'clock, the usual hour for breaking up camp. The day was clear and warm; the country parched and sandy, and therefore furnishing very little or no grass. We arrived at the fort about 2



o'clock; where I was informed that the scarcity of grass in the vicinity was owing to the three preceding years having been remarkably dry. The valley of the north fork of the Nebraska being without timber, and the soil sandy, causes a rapid evaporation of the rain that falls; so that when there is any deficiency in the quantity of this, the grass must necessarily perish.

Between Fort Laramie and the junction of the two main branches of the Nebraska, which is two hundred miles below the fort, the formation consists of marl, soft earthy limestone, and a granitic sandstone.—(Mercury at sunrise, 62°; sunset, 66°.)

112 Fort Laramie, according to Col. J. C. Fremont, is situated in 42°, 12', 10" N. latitude, and 104°, 47', 43" W. longitude. It belongs to the American Fur Company, and is built upon the left bank of the Laramie river, a bold mountain stream of clear and refreshingly cool water, which strongly contrasts with the warm, turbid waters of the Nebraska, in both its branches.

The fort has somewhat the appearance of a military construction, and presented a rather imposing front. It is built upon a rising ground, twenty-five feet above the water; and its lofty whitewashed, and picketed walls, when so seen as to take in the bastions, look quite formidable. The great entrance fronts toward the river; and being about fifteen feet long, floored, and covered by the square tower which defends it, affords a pleasant place to sit and enjoy the exhilarating breezes for which the surrounding country is famous. The fort is of a quadrangular form, having walls fifteen feet high, built, according to the Mexican usage, of adobies, or large sun-dried bricks, and surmounted by a wooden palisade. The four walls are defended by bastions, diagonally opposite to each other, and considerably raised. There is a small entrance in the wall, immediately opposite the main one, serving as a sort of postern-gate. The houses are generally one story high, and so built against the wall, that each

113 [Picture of Fort Laramie]

apartment with its single door and window faces in front; so that the whole forms an open court, nearly one hundred and thirty feet square.

I was received by Mr. Bodeau, the gentleman in charge of the post, with much kindness; and he readily supplied me with moccasins, dried bison flesh, and seasoned timber to be used for false spokes to my wagon-wheels as might be found necessary. He informed me that the object of the establishment is for the purchase of furs and buffalo robes from the neighboring Indian tribes, who receive in exchange tobacco, blankets, whisky, powder, lead, calico, vermilion, looking-glasses, rings, ribbons, glass-beads, and cheap ornaments.

The introduction of ardent spirits into the traffic is defended on the ground that in the present state of things, the itinerant or peddling trader, who is called by the French trappers, coureur des bois, having no permanent and fixed interest in the country, uses it in his traffic with the natives, and thereby compels the regular trader to do so, in order to prevent the Indians from going over to this unsettled rival.

An Indian will sell his furs, traps, robes, horses, lodge, weapons, and even his wife and children, for "fire water." To supply them with it has a direct tendency to destroy the trade, by the destruction of the Indians, which it necessarily effects in time. The regular trader is aware of this, and therefore has great interest in keeping it out. If, however, the coureur des bois, in violation of the laws of God, of humanity and of his country, sells spirituous liquors to the Indians, the regular trader must do so likewise, or abandon the field to his unscrupulous rival.

114 The extraordinary rapidity with which the bisons have disappeared within a few years, has often been the subject of remark by travelers as well as by traders.

The Indian tribes in the country around Fort Laramie, and especially the Sioux



and Cheyennes, become each year more and more hostile to, and jealous of the whites; and nothing but a dread of bringing upon themselves the military force of the United States, of whose power and strength they seem to have some confused idea, restrains them from making an open war upon the emigrants, as they pass through their country, on their way to Oregon. Some of the Sioux chiefs, who were at the fort, advised us, through Mr. Bodeau, to proceed immediately on our way, and join ourselves to larger parties of emigrants in advance, and not to remain in camp until Tuesday, as we had proposed. They stated that their people were in great force among the hills, some miles distant, preparing to send out a large war-party, to fight the Crows, and their allies the Snakes, through whose country we had yet to pass. They stated that several hundred lodges would be gathered on the following morning; and, as they were not pleased with the whites, and, in addition to this were at that time sulky and cross, in anticipation of their fighting with the Crows and Snakes, it would not be advisable to be in camp when they should arrive; as they would annoy us by at least begging and stealing, if not by open robbery.

115 For the purpose of conciliating good-will, our party prepared a supper for all the Indians who then had lodges near the fort. Among the chiefs, was one who showed us a certificate from L. W. Hastings, to the effect that this savage had saved his life at Independence Rock, in 1842, by delivering him out of the hands of the Indians, who had there seized him.

Upon a hill, half a mile from the fort, I observed a place of Indian sepulture. Many of the dead were lying upon scaffolds erected for the purpose, and they were wrapped in bison robes. The bones of others had fallen down, and were bleaching upon the ground, in little inclosures made to protect them from beasts of prey. A few of the bodies were inclosed in boxes. The wolves howled around the place all night.

Mr. Bodeau appeared to receive with pleasure two large bundles of tracts, which I left with him for the use of the fort. Most of the white men about the place had taken Indian wives, and there were many little half-breeds about the doors. A worthless white woman, who had been in one of the forward companies, had stopped at this place.

Mr. Fitzpatrick, who has spent many years upon the plains around this trading post, and among the Rocky Mountains, says, that at Fort Laramie there is very seldom any snow, that he has never seen a depth of more than fifteen inches; and even this does not remain upon the ground more than two or three days.--(Mercury at sunrise, 62°; sunset, 65°.)

116 June 29.--We were all ready for an early start, being again admonished to hasten forward so as to unite with others for defense, as it was alleged that the war-party would set out to meet their enemies; and that if they should even pass us without molesting us, yet that upon returning, if they were victorious their pride would prompt them to be insolent, and if defeated their anger and resentment would be vented upon us. As we were about to leave camp, the Indians dressed in their best savage finery and ornaments began to appear in small bodies on horseback upon the neighboring hills, whence they swept down the long slopes, until we were surrounded by many hundred warriors.

Mrs. Thornton says, in her journal: "These Indians appear more independent and high-spirited than any we have seen. They seem to be in good circumstances. Some of them were really elegantly dressed, in Indian style. I shook hands with a great many of them, this being their manner of expressing a desire to be friends and at peace. Few of our city exquisites can present a hand so soft and elegantly formed as were those of these Indians."

I imagine that Mr. Thornton looked upon these people with that sort of romantic enthusiasm for Indians, and Indian character, which the erroneous and pernicious sketches



of them usually seen in our books are so well calculated to inspire. For myself, I must say that, regarding them with the impartial eye of reason, and in the light of facts, which shows objects in their natural colors, and not through fancy, by which every thing is seen in a false light, I saw nothing to admire, but every thing to excite mingled emotions of pity, contempt, disgust, and loathing.

A few miles from the fort we passed through the crater of an extinct volcano. About 2 o'clock we passed a large spring, about 150 yards to our right; but the wagons had generally passed before it was discovered, so that our cattle, although they were very thirsty, from having traveled in a warm day over hot sands, were yet without water.

117 The country over which we passed during the day was generally hilly, almost destitute of grass, but having a multitude of wild sunflowers, prickly pears, and worm-wood. The hills in the distance appeared to be covered with cedars. A little before sunset we encamped near the margin of a small stream, where we had but little grass. The bison had entirely disappeared.—(Mercury at sunrise, 61°; sunset, 65°.)

June 30.—On the following day great confusion prevailed in camp, in consequence of some of the Californians whom we had overtaken in the morning, and some of our own party, desiring to remain in camp; while others of both parties wished to proceed. Finally the Californians all determined to go forward. Messrs. Crump, Vanbebber, and Luce, who had left us on the preceding Sabbath, continuing with them.

Between 10 and 11 o'clock intelligence came to our little camp that a large body of emigrants had arrived at Fort Laramie, after one of their number, a Mr. Trimble, had been killed by the Pawnees; and that a large number of Sioux Indians would probably arrive at our camp during the day. This determined us to break up camp without delay; and at 2 o'clock we were again en route among the Black Hills, which we had entered soon after passing the large spring at 2 o'clock on the day before. We drove over a dreary and desolate country, and halted about half an hour before sunset, on the margin of a piece of low land at the left of the road, well covered with grass. Near by was a creek of excellent water, affording an abundant supply of wood. Laramie Peak, which can be seen from a point sixty miles east of the fort, was in full view.

118 Grasshoppers (known among the emigrants as sanderickets) were seen in immense numbers during the day, and rose in a little cloud before us, as we walked along. We saw little or no grass, except along the ravines and water-courses.—(Mercury at sunrise, 60°; sunset, 53°.)

July 1.—We rose before the stars were gone, and had breakfast over before the sun was above the horizon. We broke up our encampment at 30 minutes past 9 o'clock, and at 10 o'clock, A. M. passed the yet smoking camp-fires of the party of Californians in advance of us. We passed a prairie-dog village during the day. I saw one of these little animals, and heard many more. The country was hilly and poor, although there were many very large pine trees. One of those hills was the highest and steepest we had seen. We saw, for the first time, the large hare; also many beautiful white flax flowers, one of delicate blue, resembling the flax blossom, but much larger. The common blue flax abounded. We encamped on the bank of a small creek, at a place from which we saw Laramie Peak towering up in the distance, with its clearly defined, dark outlines standing against the face of the sky, large, massive, and sublime.—(Mercury at sunrise, 54°; sunset, 67°.)