

Interesting Account of a Trip Across the Plains in 1853, read before the Guests of the Shakespeare Club

By MRS. E. O. TOMPKINS

Read by Mrs. E. O. Tompkins at a reception given to the pioneer ladies of Nevada City, by the Shakespeare Club, and is descriptive of her trip across the plains. "Kindness Grass Valley Tidings."

Early in the year 1853 my father, Thomas Butterfield, a native of Maine, left Appleton, Outagamie county, Wisconsin, with his family to cross the plains to California. We had two wagons, six horses and a little roan Indian pony called "Bub." "Bub" lived many years after we reached California. We did not camp until we got to the Missouri River, for it was too cold and stormy, but stopped at hotels. We crossed the Mississippi near Dubuque. There were no towns near, so we stopped at the Captain's home. His wife was a fine looking woman of Indian and white descent. A Swedish woman was the housekeeper and everything was clean and in good order. The next river we crossed was Red Cedar, at Cedar Rapids. That was quite a large town then. We got to the Des Moines River next, but passed the city on the right. At this time we saw a prairie fire, which I had read so much about. The grass was dry and the flames leaped like animals. It did not reach the house where we were staying, for some reason I do not remember why.

The next place of note that I remember was Larimore's Grove. No trees were growing there. They had all been cut down to build two little houses. They were crowded full of emigrants. We soon came to the Missouri River at Council Bluffs crossing, as it was called then.

We were now at the edge of the plains. We stopped on the Iowa side of the river waiting for the ground to dry. We had a jolly time waiting because so many families were camping there. We had the use of a large old house with a number of other families. There were many large houses like hotels scattered about, and some small ones, all very cheaply built with as little lumber as could be used.

On the 24th day of April, my twenty-second birthday, we crossed the Missouri on an old steamer and landed in Nebraska. It was just the plains then. Looking up the river, we could see Council Bluffs. This place was just mounds where the Indians used to meet in council. They must have been covered with some dark evergreen trees. We were where the city of Omaha now is, but no building of any description was in sight. It was then as desolate a place as could be imagined, cold, rainy and dreary.

The wagons were heavily loaded with provisions for ourselves and grain for the horses, for there was no good grass to be had. The poor horses climbed hills and wallowed through mud-holes till they were nearly exhausted. When we got to the Elkhorn River there was another stop until a raft could be built to take the people across. Then it was better traveling. If I remember rightly, we traveled up the North Platte. The road had been traveled by emigrants years before, and wound around through the bluffs, or little mounds, so we could hardly see ahead. Then we thought what a good place it would be for

the Indians to attack us, but no one ever molested us. Such quick showers would come up that we would get soaking wet, and then the sun would come out warm and bright. The water in the Platte was very shallow and muddy and when used for cooking purposes we sprinkled in corn meal to settle the mud. There was no shrubbery along the way for the banks were level and green.

The saddest sight of all was where old graves had been dug out by wild animals. Skeltons were scattered around and fragments of quilts and other things that had been used for burial. We saw the skeltons of many small children. In a portion of the country was the cactus. Many of the graves were covered with these plants, and then they were as safe as if covered with stone. Stone graves had no covering. It was said that Indians would dig into them to get guns that were wanted, or other articles. The emigrants would bury or burn the guns to keep them away from the Indians. Many of the graves were those of Mormons who had died during the flight from Nauvoo to Salt Lake.

One day a large number of wagons fell in line with us while we were traveling on a high ridge that overlooked a large level region of country. We went down a short steep hill where there was a spring of water and many cottonwood trees. There were many surly looking Indians here, with faces scarred with running sores. Indian women were near by with their ponies loaded with all their household articles. The loads were fastened on long poles, as you have seen in pictures, and tied to the sides of the horses. One had a basket of puppies on one side and a basket of babies on the other—all happy. We traveled along until we got to a long grassy place. Then our party held a consultation. They made a large circle of the wagons, keeping the horses in the center, and stood double watch that night. The horses knew there was trouble, for they would eat a few mouthfuls, then throw up their heads and sniff the air. In other places, too, when the men could see nothing, they scented danger.

A trader who was near said we were in danger, for the Indians were seeking revenge, as they had taken smallpox from the whites. Many of these Indians died. We were among the early emigrants and it was the later ones that suffered from the Indians, and contagious diseases. There were a great many ox teams that kept along with the horses—slow but sure. The poor creatures would drop to the ground when they stopped—too tired to eat. There was a very sandy, hot strip of country this side of Salt Lake, covered with the carcasses of dead cattle, dried like mummies. Near by was one of the prettiest little lakes that ever was seen, shaded with lovely trees. A drink of that water at the right time would have saved the thirsty creatures. There were many beautiful pictures here. One was a large spreading hemlock on the bank of the Green River. No other bush or tree was near, and the grass was short and green. I shall always see that picture as it looked to me then.

We stopped in the Salt Lake country two

weeks to recruit the horses. Children would bring little onions and lettuce and milk and butter. A neighbor in a tent asked a little boy how many wives Brigham Young had. He said, "Forty that he keeps count of, I do not know how many that he does not keep count of." It was a lovely country, but it was filled with unhappy, dissatisfied women.

Soon we got to Nevada State, crossing the desert in the night to avoid the heat, for the horses were to be considered all the time, as everything depended on them. When we were on the Humboldt River we found a large shrub with whitish green leaves and bark, bearing a very red berry. We had plenty of dried fruit and raisins, but no fresh fruit, so I picked some of the berries and cooked them. They were delicious, but not one of my family would taste them. Mother said she knew they were poisonous, but I thought not, for I knew from my studies in botany that a bitter or sweet berry may be poisonous, but never a sour one. I took some out to two old men who were eating their pancakes and bacon, and they were delighted with them. We were not poisoned after all, and we ate them as long as we could get them. Of late years I have seen notices of them in Eastern catalogs of fruit.

We crossed the Sierra Nevada mountains, stopping at many pretty little valleys. We came at last to Emigrant Gap, where the trees are worn by ropes and chains in letting down the wagons from the mountains. Then we were in Bear Valley. It was here that I saw my first rattlesnake. I recognized it from pictures I had seen, but I was so tired that I did not move, although it crawled close by me. It was the 28th day of August, 1853, when we reached Bear Valley, having finished a long, hard, but not unpleasant journey.

BETER UNSAID.

"Looks like rain today," said the milkman, as he poured the customary quart from the can to the pitcher.

"It always does," replied the house-wife, compressing her lips with cold significance.

Stifling an oath, he took up his liquid burden and departed heavily.—Minneapolis Journal.

A house where the wife rules is spoken of as "a boat steered from the bow."

"Can you cover the Sun with a sieve?" A great crime cannot be concealed.

"The house is finished, but there is still the sound of the chisel." Trying to reopen a matter which ought to be settled.

Few men live up to their obituaries.

Eva—There goes Belle. She was selling kisses at the church fair last night. She said it was for charity.

Edna—I don't doubt it. It certainly would be charity for anyone to kiss her.

Client—Si Haymow kicked my dog. Naow, I don't allow no man t' kick my dog. So I went over t' lick time outen Si. My doc charge me 17.50 to fix me up. What kin I do ter Si?

Lawyer—Why not lick him again?

Client—Say, mister, I ain't a-jokin'. I want her know.

Lawyer—Well, the only thing I can suggest is that you might have him arrested for cruelty to animals. Five dollars.

"Like a crow returning to his own country"; to return as you came, no richer, no poorer.

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(Continued from Page 41)

back before you leave these mountains. Do you want to know something that I overheard? I heard him tell Ah Sing to poison your grub and Ah Sing refused to follow his advice even for big pay. Then I heard him dicker with that devil at a half-breed that works on the hoister to shoot you from the brush at the turn of the road down yonder when you went out. He told the half-breed to swear an alibi if it came to court and that he, Bill, himself would testify that the half-breed never left his work. Now look here, Van Ward, if you want to die like a skunk at the hands of the man who hates you and who loves the woman you do, if you want to leave your body to be dug into the dirt of these here mountains you refuse my offer." By this time Ben Brander had worked himself into a fit, "Oh, how I hate him," the villain snarled, "I hate the ground he trods on, I hate the very breath he breathes; and do you know why? 'I'll tell you why, because he robbed me of the girl that could have made a man of me, Van Ward, the only person in this world that could—and that girl was his sister. She is dead now—she is dead,' for a moment he mused in silence, hanging his head, and then he continued in his trade. "What if I did drink, what if I did gamb'e, what if I did kill?" here he stopped suddenly as if he had said too much. "I loved the girl," he continued after an interval, "and she loved me I believe, and she could have made a man of me, and then that dirty dog interrupted. He busted it all up between us, and then the girl died, and that is why I hate him: I—hate—him! Now he wants to bust it up between you and her. Now's your chance, if you say the word he won't. I'll see to that; but I

want you to promise me this, sir—

"I'm a poor devil, I am, and you're rich. I want you to back me up with your money if I do the work or these damned cusses up here would stretch me for killin' him if they should catch me, and remember if you don't and I get pinched there's the gallows for you, too, and I'm the man that can deliver the goods, if I hang, you hang."

Donald sat without a word, his finely chiseled features propped up by the tapering fingers of his white hand, his cold, steel-gray eyes penetrating deep through the surface of the intruder when the Rustler again broke forth in his trade.

"We have crossed paths many times in our lives, him and me, but this'll be the last, if you say so. He'd 'a liked to 'a sent me over for rustling catt'e, he would, and robbing stages, and selling liquor to them damned Indians, and he'd 'a liked to 'a caught me at Dana," and one of those fiendish grins stole over his face, that went with the words, "I ought to 'a killed him there, but he's allus been a little too slow and he'll not catch me now either, the damned cuss," and Ben Brander arising from his chair approached Van Ward.

He had advanced but a few paces when his host stopped him. "Hold on" Donald cried out to the Rustler, whipping a revolver from his belt and leveling it at Ben Brander, "we won't trouble to discuss the matter any further. Leave that door open as you pass out. Keep in line with the door and keep your hand out of your hip-pocket." With these words the Rustler turned and passed out unhesitatingly closely accompanied by his host. After Ben Brander's footsteps had about died out on the hard sod of the mountain side, Donald called after him, "Good

night, sir," and closed the door. The only response was two pistol shots, the balls of which struck the frame building with a thud and woke up some of the men who stuck their heads out of their cabin windows and called out "what's that?" but hearing no response crept back again and the night resumed its silence, such stillness as is only known in the mountains when no disturbing element arouses the sleeping spirit of the Great Quiet. Closely locked up from all the world Donald carried in his breast the occurrences of that night for its occurred to him that to reveal it would be to confess that he had been approached.

Like a creeping wolf Ben Brander continued prowling about those mountains, hoping for vengeance, but for a long time he stayed away from the Deadwood until either hunger or the thirst for vengeance once more brought him back.

(Continued in February Number)

Salmon Eggs for Argentine

Another request has been made of the Federal Bureau of Fisheries through the Argentine Republic and a million Salmon eggs will be shipped to New York and transferred to the refrigerator compartment of a South American steamer. As New Zealand has successfully hatched steelhead trout eggs, and with such success that the streams of that country are now filled with these splendid game fish, and the eggs of the Quinnet salmon taken from the Sacramento River have been successfully transported and hatched there, and the fish have grown to maturity and returned to the main rivers to spawn, other countries have seized upon the idea and are all asking for assistance from this State.

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