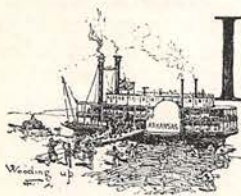




A PERIL OF THE PLAINS.

## THE FIRST EMIGRANT TRAIN TO CALIFORNIA.

BY JOHN BIDWELL (PIONEER OF '41).



IN the spring of 1839, — living at the time in the western part of Ohio, — being then in my twentieth year, I conceived a desire to see the great prairies of the West, especially those most frequently spoken of, in Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri. Emigration from the East was tending westward, and settlers had already begun to invade those rich fields.

Starting on foot to Cincinnati, ninety miles distant, I fortunately got a chance to ride most of the way on a wagon loaded with farm produce. My outfit consisted of about \$75, the clothes I wore, and a few others in a knapsack which I carried in the usual way strapped upon my shoulders, for in those days travelers did not have valises or trunks. Though traveling was considered dangerous, I had no weapon more formidable than a pocket-knife. From Cincinnati I went down the Ohio River by steamboat to the Mississippi, up the Mississippi to St. Louis, and thence to Burlington,

in what was then the Territory of Iowa. Those were bustling days on the western rivers, which were then the chief highways of travel. The scenes at the wood landings I recall as particularly lively and picturesque. Many passengers would save a little by helping to "wood the boat," *i. e.*, by carrying wood down the bank and throwing it on the boat, a special ticket being issued on that condition. It was very interesting to see the long lines of passengers coming up the gang-plank, each with two or three sticks of wood on his shoulders. An anecdote is told of an Irishman who boarded a western steamer and wanted to know the fare to St. Louis, and, being told, asked, "What do you charge for 150 pounds of freight?" Upon learning the price, a small amount, he announced that he would go as freight. "All right," said the captain; "put him down in the hold and lay some flour barrels on him to keep him down."

In 1839 Burlington had perhaps not over two hundred inhabitants, though it was the capital of Iowa Territory. After consultation with the governor, Robert Lucas of Ohio, I

concluded to go into the interior and select a tract of land on the Iowa River. In those days one was permitted to take up 160 acres, and where practicable it was usual to take part timber and part prairie. After working awhile at putting up a log house — until all the people in the neighborhood became ill with fever and ague—I concluded to move on and strike out to the south and southwest into Missouri. I traveled across country, sometimes by the sun, without road or trail. There were houses and settlements, but they were scattered; sometimes one would have to go twenty miles to find a place to stay at night. The principal game seen was the prairie hen (*Tetraonide cupido*); the prairie wolf (*Canis latrans*) also abounded. Continuing southwest and passing through Huntsville I struck the Missouri River near Keytesville in Chariton County. Thence I continued up the north side of the river till the westernmost settlement in Missouri was reached; this was in Platte County. The Platte Purchase, as it was called, had been recently bought from the Indians, and was newly but thickly settled, on account of its proximity to navigation, its fine timber, good water, and unsurpassed fertility.

On the route I traveled I cannot recall seeing an emigrant wagon in Missouri. The western movement, which subsequently filled Missouri and other Western States and overflowed into the adjoining Territories, had then hardly begun, except as to Platte County. The contest in Congress over the Platte Purchase, which by increasing the area of Missouri gave more territory to slavery, called wide attention to that charming region. The anti-slavery sentiment even at that date ran quite high. This was, I believe, the first addition to slave territory after the Missouri Compromise. But slavery won. The rush that followed in the space of one or two years filled the most desirable part of the purchase to overflowing. The imagination could not conceive a finer country — lovely, rolling, fertile, wonderfully productive, beautifully arranged for settlement, part prairie and part timber. The land was unsurveyed. Every settler had aimed to locate a half-mile from his neighbor, and there was as yet no conflict. Peace and contentment reigned. Nearly every place seemed to have a beautiful spring of clear cold water. The hills and prairies and the level places were alike

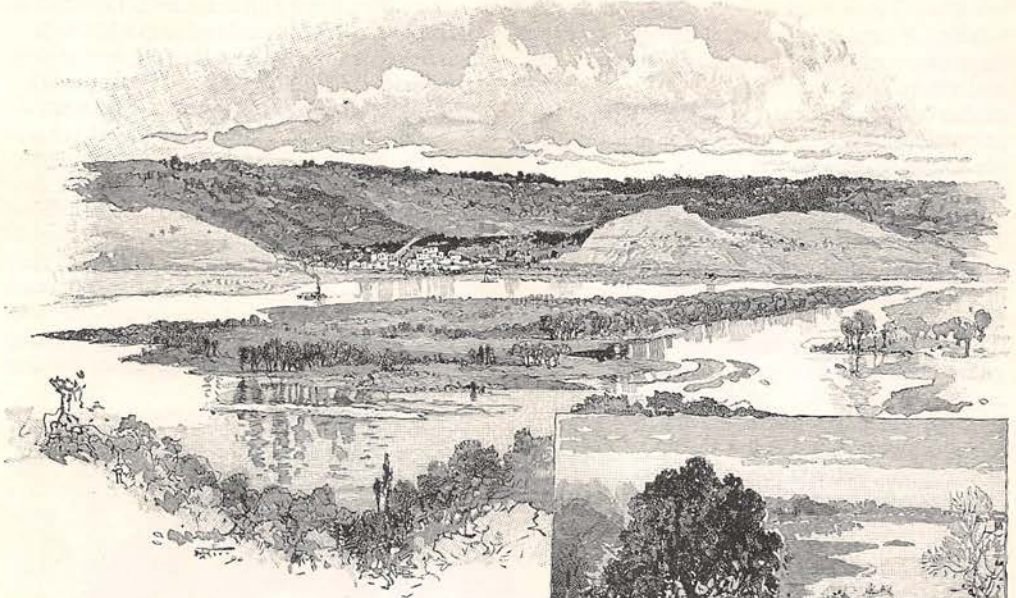
covered with a black and fertile soil. I cannot recall seeing an acre of poor land in Platte County. Of course there was intense longing on the part of the people of Missouri to have the Indians removed, and a corresponding desire, as soon as the purchase was consummated, to get possession of the beautiful land. It was in some sense perhaps a kind of Oklahoma movement. Another feature was the abundance of wild honey-bees. Every tree that had a hollow in it seemed to be a bee-tree, and every hollow was full of rich golden honey. A singular fact which I learned from old hunters was that the honey-bee was never found more than seventy or eighty miles in advance of the white settlements on the



JOHN BIDWELL.  
(FROM A DAGUERRETYPE TAKEN BY BRADY IN 1850.)

frontier. On this attractive land I set my affections, intending to make it my home.

On my arrival, my money being all spent, I was obliged to accept the first thing that offered, and began teaching school in the country about five miles from the town of Weston, which was located on the north side of the Missouri River and about four miles above Fort Leavenworth in Kansas Territory.



THE MISSOURI RIVER AT WESTON, FROM THE KANSAS SIDE.



SITE OF THE OLD STOCKADE, FORT LEAVENWORTH.

Possibly some may suppose it did not take much education to teach a country school at that period in Missouri. The rapid settlement of that new region had brought together people of all classes and conditions, and had thrown into juxtaposition almost every phase of intelligence as well as of illiteracy. But there was no lack of self-reliance or native shrewdness in any class, and I must say that I learned to have a high esteem for the people, among whom I found warm and lifelong friends.

But even in Missouri there were drawbacks. Rattlesnakes and copperheads were abundant. One man, it was said, found a place to suit him, but on alighting from his horse heard so many snakes that he concluded to go farther. At his second attempt, finding more snakes instead of fewer, he left the country altogether. I taught school there in all about a year. My arrival was in June, 1839, and in the fall of that year the surveyors came on to lay out the country: the lines ran every way, sometimes through a man's house, sometimes through his barn, so that there was much confusion and trouble about boundaries, etc. By the favor of certain men, and by paying a small amount for a little piece of fence here and a small clearing there, I got a claim, and purposed to make it my home, and to have my father remove there from Ohio.

In the following summer, 1840, the weather was very hot, so that during the vacation I could do but little work on my place, and needing some supplies,—books, clothes, etc.,—I concluded to take a trip to St. Louis, which

I did by way of the Missouri River. The distance was six hundred miles by water; the down trip occupied two days, and was one of the most delightful experiences of my life. But returning, the river being low and full of snags, and the steamboat heavily laden,—the boats were generally light going down,—we were continually getting on sand bars, and were delayed nearly a month. This trip proved to be the turning-point in my life, for while I was gone a man had jumped my land. Generally in such cases public sentiment was against the jumper, and it was decidedly so in my case. But the scoundrel held on. He was a bully—had killed a man in Callaway County—and everybody seemed afraid of him. Influential friends of mine tried to persuade him to let me have eighty acres, half of the claim. But he was stubborn, and said that all he wanted was just what the law allowed him. Unfortunately for me, he had the legal advantage. I had worked some now and then on the place, but had not actually lived on it. The law required a certain residence, and that the preëmptor should be twenty-one years of age or a man of family. I was neither, and could do nothing. Nearly all I had earned had been spent upon the land, and when that

was taken I lost about everything I had. There being no possibility of getting another claim to suit me, I resolved to go elsewhere when spring should open.

In November or December of 1840, while still teaching school in Platte County, I came across a Frenchman named Roubideaux, who said he had been to California. He had been a trader in New Mexico, and had followed the road traveled by traders from the frontier

we could ask him was answered favorably. Generally the first question which a Missourian asked about a country was whether there was any fever and ague. I remember his answer distinctly. He said there was but one man in California that had ever had a chill there, and it was a matter of so much wonderment to the people of Monterey that they went eighteen miles into the country to see him shake. Nothing could have been more satisfactory on the



LOW WATER ON THE MISSOURI.

of Missouri to Santa Fe. He had probably gone through what is now New Mexico and Arizona into California by the Gila River trail used by the Mexicans. His description of California was in the superlative degree favorable, so much so that I resolved if possible to see that wonderful land, and with others helped to get up a meeting at Weston and invited him to make a statement before it in regard to the country. At that time when a man moved out West, as soon as he was fairly settled he wanted to move again, and naturally every question imaginable was asked in regard to this wonderful country. Roubideaux described it as one of perennial spring and boundless fertility, and laid stress on the countless thousands of wild horses and cattle. He told about oranges, and hence must have been at Los Angeles, or the mission of San Gabriel, a few miles from it. Every conceivable question that

score of health. He said that the Spanish authorities were most friendly, and that the people were the most hospitable on the globe; that you could travel all over California and it would cost you nothing for horses or food. Even the Indians were friendly. His description of the country made it seem like a Paradise.

The result was that we appointed a corresponding secretary, and a committee to report a plan of organization. A pledge was drawn up in which every signer agreed to purchase a suitable outfit, and to rendezvous at Sapling Grove in what is now the State of Kansas, on the 9th of the following May, armed and equipped to cross the Rocky Mountains to California. We called ourselves the Western Emigration Society, and as soon as the pledge was drawn up every one who agreed to come signed his name to it, and it took like wildfire.



In a short time, I think within a month, we had about five hundred names; we also had correspondence on the subject with people all over Missouri, and even as far east as Illinois and Kentucky, and as far south as Arkansas. As soon as the movement was announced in the papers we had many letters of inquiry, and we expected people in considerable numbers to join us. About that time we heard of a man living in Jackson County, Missouri, who had received a letter from a person in California named Dr. Marsh, speaking favorably of the country, and a copy of this letter was published.

Our ignorance of the route was complete. We knew that California lay west, and that was the extent of our knowledge. Some of the maps consulted, supposed of course to be correct, showed a lake in the vicinity of where Salt Lake now is; it was represented as a long lake, three or four hundred miles in extent, narrow and with two outlets, both running into the Pacific Ocean, either apparently larger than the Mississippi River. An intelligent man with whom I boarded—Elam Brown, who till recently lived in California, dying when over ninety years of age—possessed a map that showed these rivers to be large, and he advised me to take tools along to make canoes, so that if we found the country so rough that we could not get along with our wagons we could descend one of those rivers to the Pacific. Even Frémont knew nothing about Salt Lake until 1843, when for the first time he explored it and mapped it correctly, his report being first printed, I think, in 1845.

This being the first movement to cross the Rocky Mountains to California, it is not surprising that it suffered reverses before we were fairly started. One of these was the publication of a letter in a New York newspaper giving a depressing view of the country for which we were all so confidently longing. It seems that in 1837 or 1838 a man by the name of Farnham, a lawyer, went from New York City into the Rocky Mountains for his health. He was an invalid, hopelessly gone with consumption it was thought, and as a last resort he went into the mountains, traveled with the trappers, lived in the open air as the trappers lived, eating only meat as they did, and in two or three years he entirely regained his health; but instead of returning east by way of St. Louis, as he had gone, he went down the Columbia River and took a vessel to Monterey and thence to San Blas, making his way through Mexico to New York. Upon his return—in February or March, 1841—he published the letter mentioned. His bad opinion of California was based wholly on his unfortunate experience in Monterey, which I will recount.

In 1840 there lived in California an old Rocky Mountaineer by the name of Isaac Graham. He was injudicious in his talk, and by boasting that the United States or Texas would some day take California, he excited the hostility and jealousy of the people. In those days Americans were held in disfavor by the native Californians on account of the war made by Americans in Texas to wrest Texas from Mexico. The number of Americans in California at this time was very small. When I went to California in 1841 all the foreigners—and all were foreigners except Indians and Mexicans—did not, I think, exceed one hundred; nor was the character of all of them the most prepossessing. Some had been trappers in the Rocky Mountains who had not seen civilization for a quarter of a century; others were men who had found their way into California, as Roubideaux had done, by way of Mexico; others still had gone down the Columbia River to Oregon and joined trapping parties in the service of the Hudson Bay Company going from Oregon to California—men who would let their beards grow down to their knees, and wear buckskin garments made and fringed like those of the Indians, and who considered it a compliment to be told "I took ye for an Injin." Another class of men from the Rocky Mountains were in the habit of making their way by the Mohave Desert south of the Sierra Nevada into California to steal horses, sometimes driving off four or five hundred at a time. The other Americans, most numerous perhaps, were sailors who had run away from vessels and remained in the country. With few exceptions this was the character of the American population when I came to California, and they were not generally a class calculated to gain much favor with the people. Farnham happened to come into the bay of Monterey when this fellow Graham and his confederates, and all others whom the Californians suspected, were under arrest in irons on board a vessel, ready for transportation to San Blas in Mexico, whither indeed they were taken, and where some of them died in irons. I am not sure that at this time the English had a consul in California; but the United States had none, and there was no one there to take the part of the Americans. Farnham, being a lawyer, doubtless knew that the proceeding was illegal. He went ashore and protested against it, but without effect, as he was only a private individual. Probably he was there on a burning hot day, and saw only the dreary sandhills to the east of the old town of Monterey. On arriving in New York he published the letter referred to, describing how Americans were oppressed by the native Californians, and how dangerous it was for Americans to go there. The merchants of Platte



"I TOOK YE FOR AN INJIN."

County had all along protested against our going, and had tried from the beginning to discourage and break up the movement, saying it was the most unheard-of, foolish, wild-goose chase that ever entered into the brain of man for five hundred people to pull up stakes, leave that beautiful country, and go away out to a region that we knew nothing of. But they made little headway until this letter of Farnham's appeared. They republished it in a paper in the town of Liberty in Clay County,—there being no paper published in Platte County,—and sent it broadcast all over the surrounding region. The result was that as the people began to think more seriously about the scheme the membership of the society began dropping off, and so it happened at last that of all the five hundred that signed the pledge I was the only one that got ready; and even I had hard work

to do so, for I had barely means to buy a wagon, a gun, and provisions. Indeed, the man who was going with me, and who was to furnish the horses, backed out, and there I was with my wagon!

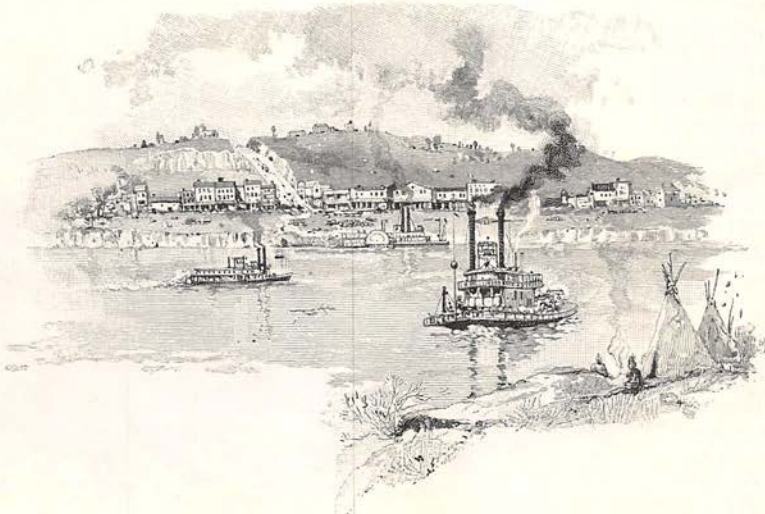
During the winter, to keep the project alive, I had made two or three trips into Jackson County, Missouri, crossing the Missouri River, always dangerous in winter when ice was running, by the ferry at Westport Landing, now Kansas City. Sometimes I had to go ten miles farther down—sixty miles from Weston—to a safer ferry at Independence Landing in order to get into Jackson County, to see men who were talking of going to California, and to get information.

At the last moment before the time to start for the rendezvous at Sapling Grove—it seemed almost providential—along came a

man named George Henshaw, an invalid, from Illinois, I think. He was pretty well dressed, was riding a fine black horse, and had ten or fifteen dollars. I persuaded him to let me take his horse and trade him for a yoke of steers to pull the wagon and a sorry-looking, one-eyed mule for him to ride. We went *via* Weston to lay in some supplies. One wagon and four or five persons here joined us. On leaving Weston, where there had been so much opposition, we were six or seven in number, and nearly half the town followed us for a mile, and some for five or six miles, to bid us good-by, showing the deep interest felt in our journey. All expressed good wishes and desired to hear from us. When we reached Sapling Grove, the place of rendezvous, in May, 1841, there was but one wagon ahead of us. For the next few days one or two wagons would come each day, and among the recruits were three families from Arkansas. We organized by electing as captain of the company a man named Bartleson from Jackson County, Missouri. He was not the best man for the position, but we were given to understand that if he was not elected captain he would not go; and as he had seven or eight men with him, and we did not want the party diminished, he was chosen. Every one furnished his own supplies. The party consisted of sixty-nine, including men, women, and children. Our teams were of oxen, mules, and horses. We had no cows, as the later emigrants usually had, and the lack of milk was a great deprivation to the children. It was understood that every one should have not less than a barrel of flour with sugar and so forth to suit; but I laid in one hundred pounds of flour more than

the usual quantity, besides other things. This I did because we were told that when we got into the mountains we probably would get out of bread and have to live on meat alone, which I thought would kill me even if it did not others. My gun was an old flint-lock rifle, but a good one. Old hunters told me to have nothing to do with cap or percussion locks, that they were unreliable, and that if I got my caps or percussion wet I could not shoot, while if I lost my flint I could pick up another on the plains. I doubt whether there was one hundred dollars in money in the whole party, but all were enthusiastic and anxious to go.

In five days after my arrival we were ready to start, but no one knew where to go, not even the captain. Finally a man came up, one of the last to arrive, and announced that a company of Catholic missionaries were on their way from St. Louis to the Flathead nation of Indians with an old Rocky Mountaineer for a guide, and that if we would wait another day they would be up with us. At first we were independent, and thought we could not afford to wait for a slow missionary party. But when we found that no one knew which way to go, we sobered down and waited for them to come up; and it was well we did, for otherwise probably not one of us would ever have reached California, because of our inexperience. Afterwards when we came in contact with Indians our people were so easily excited that if we had not had with us an old mountaineer the result would certainly have been disastrous. The name of the guide was Captain Fitzpatrick; he had been at the head of trapping parties in the Rocky Mountains for many years. He and the missionary party went with



WESTPORT LANDING, KANSAS CITY. (FROM A PRINT OF THE PERIOD.)





FATHER DE SMET.

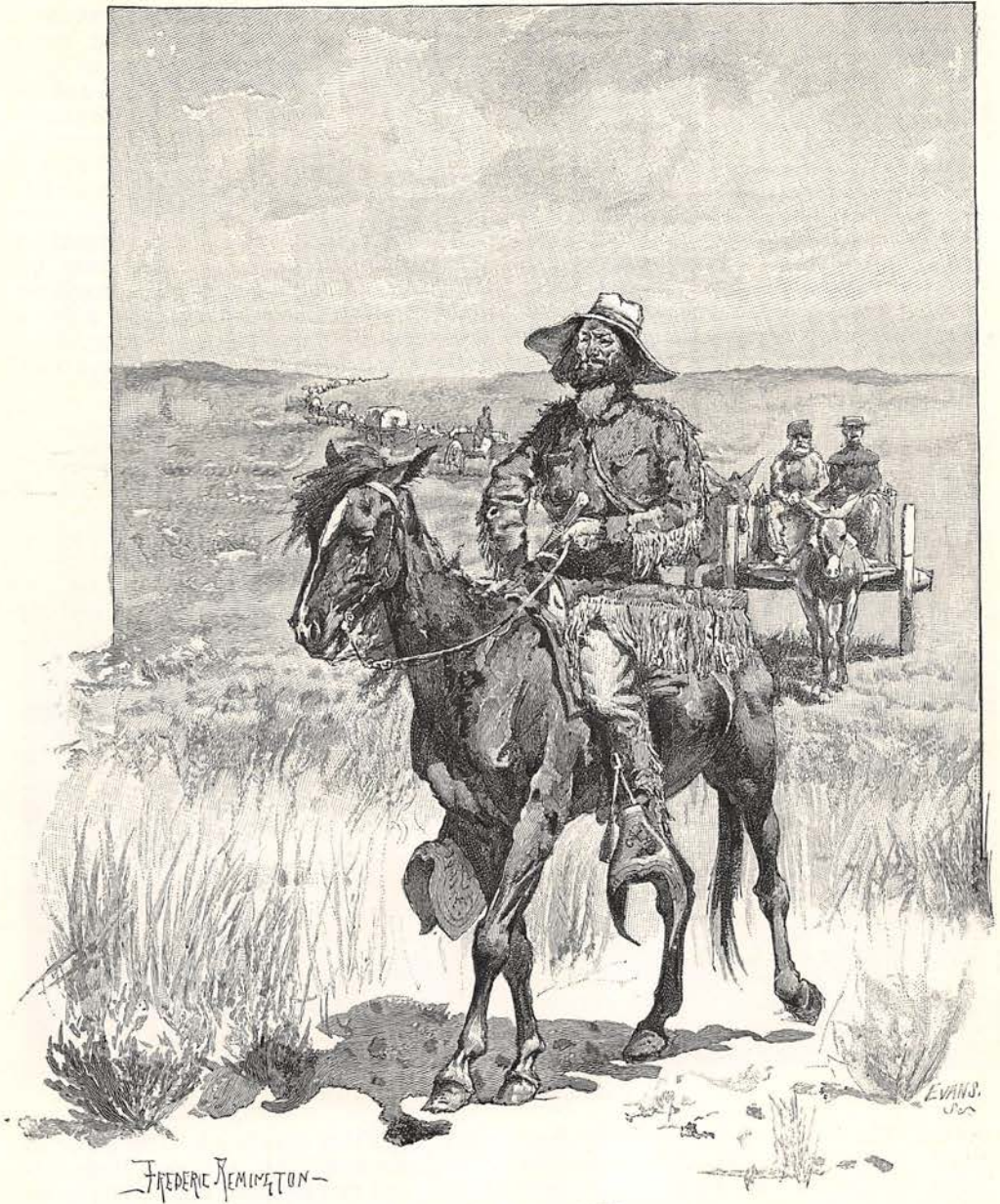
us as far as Soda Springs, now in Idaho Territory, whence they turned north to the Flathead nation. The party consisted of three Roman Catholic priests—Father De Smet, Father Pont, Father Mengarini—and ten or eleven French Canadians, and accompanying them were an old mountaineer named John Gray and a young Englishman named Romaine, and also a man named Baker. They seemed glad to have us with them, and we certainly were glad to have their company. Father De Smet had been to the Flathead nation before. He had gone out with a trapping party, and on his return had traveled with only a guide by another route, farther to the north and through hostile tribes. He was genial, of fine presence, and one of the saintliest men I have ever known, and I cannot wonder that the Indians were made to believe him divinely protected. He was a man of great kind-

ness and great affability under all circumstances; nothing seemed to disturb his temper. The Canadians had mules and Red River carts, instead of wagons and horses,—two mules to each cart, five or six of them,—and in case of steep hills they would hitch three or four of the animals to one cart, always working them tandem. Sometimes a cart would go over, breaking everything in it to pieces; and at such times Father De Smet would be just the same—beaming with good humor.

In general our route lay from near Westport, where Kansas City now is, northwesterly over the prairie, crossing several streams, till we struck the Platte River. Then we followed along the south side of the Platte to and a day's journey or so along the South Fork. Here the features of the country became more bold and interesting. Then crossing the South Fork of the Platte, and following up the north side for a day or so, we went over to the North Fork and camped at Ash Hollow; thence up the north side of that fork, passing those noted landmarks known as the Court House Rocks, Chimney Rock, Scott's Bluffs, etc., till we came to Fort Laramie, a trading post of the American Fur Company, near which was Lupton's Fort, belonging, as I understood, to some rival company. Thence after several days we came to another noted landmark called



A BIT OF ROUGH ROAD.



ON THE WAY TO THE PLATTE.

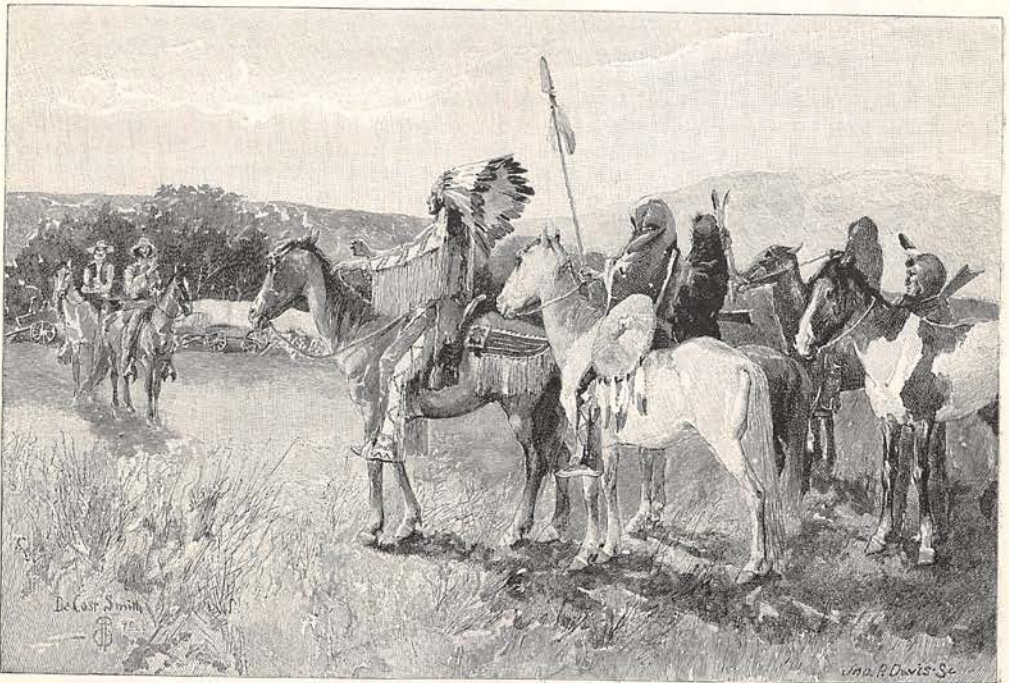
Independence Rock, on a branch of the North Platte called the Sweetwater, which we followed up to the head, soon after striking the Little Sandy, and then the Big Sandy, which empties into Green River. Next we crossed Green River to Black Fork, which we followed up till we came to Ham's Fork, at the head of which we crossed the divide between Green and Bear rivers. Then we followed Bear River down to Soda Springs. The waters of Bear Lake discharged through that river, which we

continued to follow down on the west side till we came to Salt Lake. Then we went around the north end of the lake and struck out to the west and southwest.

For a time, until we reached the Platte River, one day was much like another. We set forth every morning and camped every night, detailing men to stand guard. Captain Fitzpatrick and the missionary party would generally take the lead and we would follow. Fitzpatrick knew all about the Indian tribes, and

when there was any danger we kept in a more compact body, to protect one another. At other times we would be scattered along, sometimes for half a mile or more. We were generally together, because there was often work to be done to avoid delay. We had to make the road, frequently digging down steep banks, filling gulches, removing stones, etc. In such cases everybody would take a spade or do something to help make the road passable. When we camped at night we usually drew the wagons and carts together in a hollow square and picketed our animals inside in the corral. The wagons were common ones and of no special pattern, and some of them were

effect, to control and pacify them. Every man started his team into a run, till the oxen, like the mules and horses, were in a full gallop. Captain Fitzpatrick went ahead and directed them to follow, and as fast as they came to the bank of the river he put the wagons in the form of a hollow square and had all the animals securely picketed within. After a while the Indians came in sight. There were only forty of them, but they were well mounted on horses, and were evidently a war party, for they had no women except one, a medicine woman. They came up and camped within a hundred yards of us on the river below. Fitzpatrick told us that they would not have come

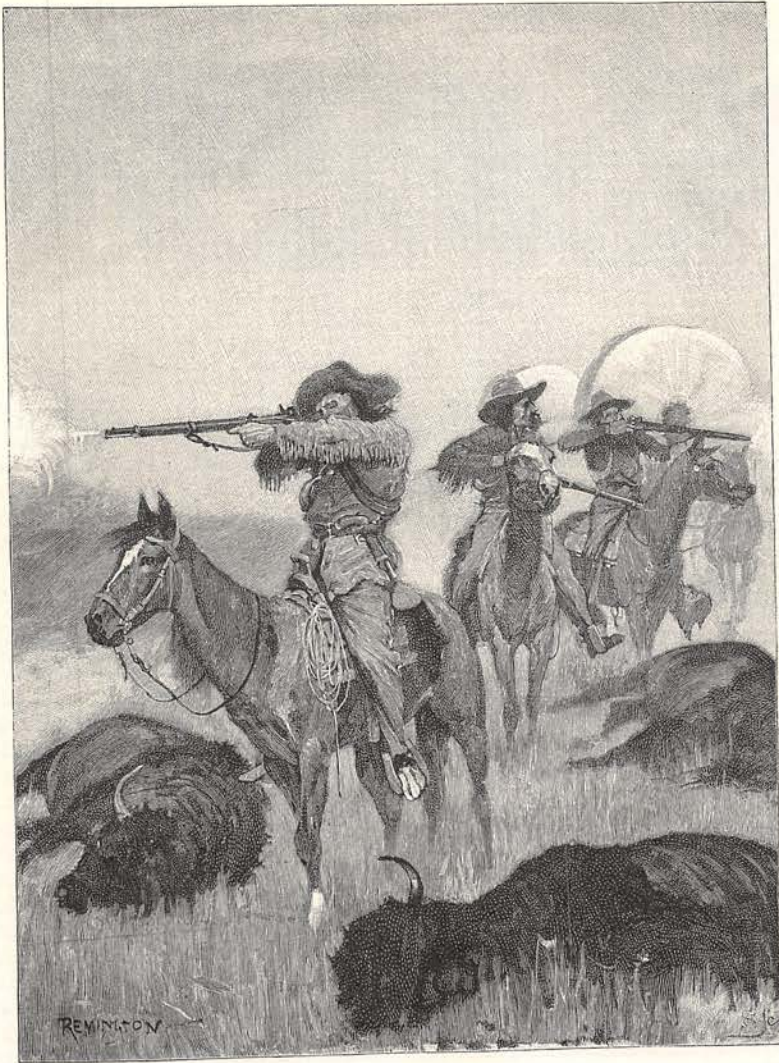


A POWWOW WITH CHEYENNES.

covered. The tongue of one would be fastened to the back of another. To lessen the danger from Indians, we usually had no fires at night and did our cooking in the daytime.

The first incident was a scare that we had from a party of Cheyenne Indians just before we reached the Platte River, about two weeks after we set out. One of our men who chanced to be out hunting, some distance from the company and behind us, suddenly appeared without mule, gun, or pistol, and lacking most of his clothes, and in great excitement reported that he had been surrounded by thousands of Indians. The company, too, became excited, and Captain Fitzpatrick tried, but with little

in that way if they were hostile. Our hunter in his excitement said that there were thousands of them, and that they had robbed him of his gun, mule, and pistol. When the Indians had put up their lodges Fitzpatrick and John Gray, the old hunter mentioned, went out to them and by signs were made to understand that the Indians did not intend to hurt the man or to take his mule or gun, but that he was so excited when he saw them that they had to disarm him to keep him from shooting them; they did not know what had become of his pistol or of his clothes, which he said they had torn off. They surrendered the mule and the gun, thus showing that they were friendly. They proved to be Cheyenne Indians.

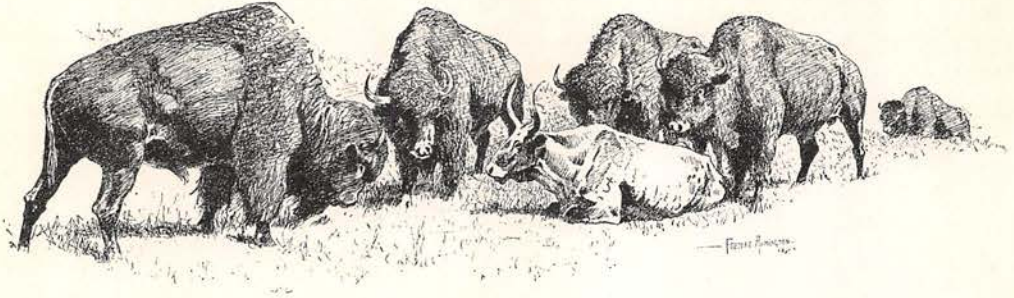


SPLITTING THE HERD.

Ever afterwards that man went by the name of Cheyenne Dawson.

As soon as we struck the buffalo country we found a new source of interest. Before reaching the Platte we had seen an abundance of antelope and elk, prairie wolves and villages of prairie dogs, but only an occasional buffalo. We now began to kill buffaloes for food, and at the suggestion of John Gray, and following the practice of Rocky Mountain white hunters, our people began to kill them just to get the tongues and the marrow bones, leaving all the rest of the meat on the plains for the wolves to eat. But the Cheyennes, who traveled ahead of us for two or three days, set us a better example. At their camps we noticed that when they killed buffaloes they took all the meat, everything but the bones. Indians were never wasteful of the

buffalo except in winter for the sake of the robes, and then only in order to get the whisky which traders offered them in exchange. There is no better beef in the world than that of the buffalo; it is also very good jerked, *i. e.*, cut into strings and thoroughly dried. It was an easy matter to kill buffaloes after we got to where they were numerous, by keeping out of sight and to the leeward of them. I think I can truly say that I saw in that region in one day more buffaloes than I have seen of cattle in all my life. I have seen the plain black with them for several days' journey as far as the eye could reach. They seemed to be coming northward continually from the distant plains to the Platte to get water, and would plunge in and swim across by thousands — so numerous were they that they changed not only the color of the



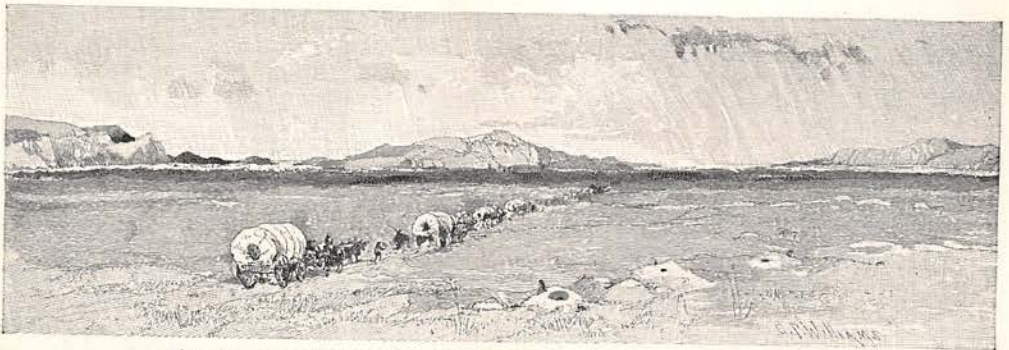
A RECRUIT FROM CIVILIZATION.

water, but its taste, until it was unfit to drink ; but we had to use it. One night when we were encamped on the South Fork of the Platte they came in such droves that we had to sit up and fire guns and make what fires we could to keep them from running over us and trampling us into the dust. We were obliged to go out some distance from camp to turn them : Captain Fitzpatrick told us that if we did not do this the buffaloes in front could not turn aside for the pressure of those behind. We could hear them thundering all night long ; the ground fairly trembled with vast approaching bands ; and if they had not been diverted, wagons, animals, and emigrants would have been trodden under their feet. One cannot nowadays describe the rush and wildness of the thing. A strange feature was that when old oxen, tired and foot-sore, got among a buffalo herd, as they sometimes would in the night, they would soon become as wild as the wildest buffalo ; and if ever recovered it was because they could not run so fast as the buffaloes or one's horse. The ground over which the herds trampled was left rather barren, but buffalo-grass being short and curling, in traveling over it they did not cut it up as much as they would other kinds.

On the Platte River, on the afternoon of one of the hottest days we experienced on the

plains, we had a taste of a cyclone : first came a terrific shower, followed by a fall of hail to the depth of four inches, some of the stones being as large as turkeys' eggs ; and the next day a waterspout—an angry, huge, whirling cloud column, which seemed to draw its water from the Platte River—passed within a quarter of a mile behind us. We stopped and braced ourselves against our wagons to keep them from being overturned. Had it struck us it doubtless would have demolished us.

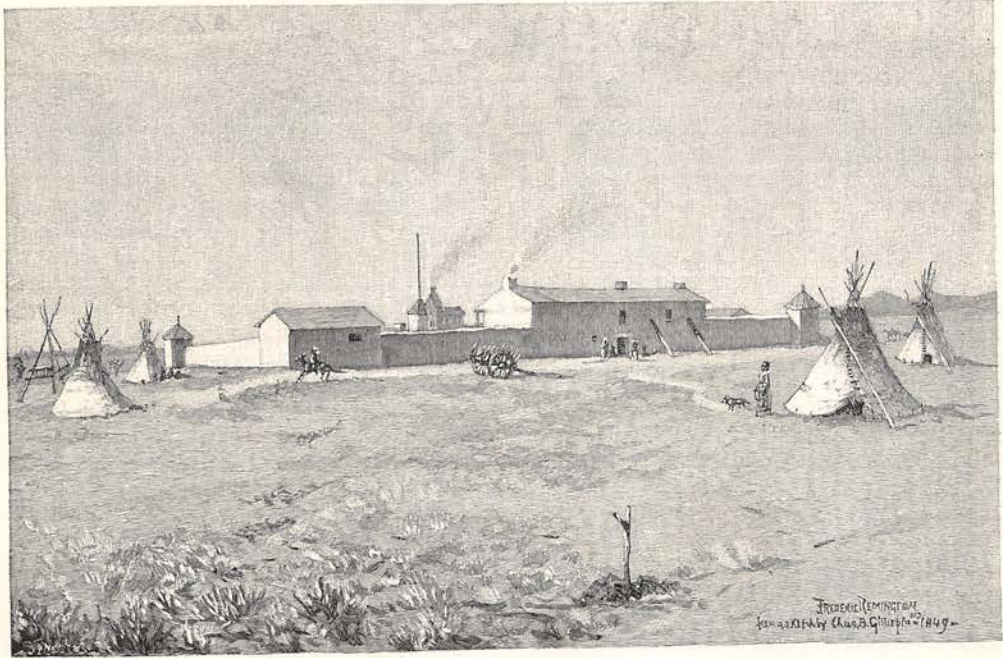
Above the junction of the forks of the Platte we continued to pass notable natural formations—first O'Fallon's Bluffs, then Court House Rocks, a group of fantastic shapes to which some of our party started to go. After they had gone what seemed fifteen or twenty miles the huge pile looked just as far off as when they started, and so they turned and came back—so deceptive are distances in the clear atmosphere of the Rocky Mountains. A noted landmark on the North Fork, which we sighted fifty miles away, was Chimney Rock. It was then nearly square, and I think it must have been fifty feet higher than now, though after we passed it a portion of it fell off. Scott's Bluffs are known to emigrants for their picturesqueness. These formations, like those first mentioned, are composed of indurated yellow clay or soft sand rock ; they are washed and broken



O'FALLON'S BLUFFS FROM NEAR THE JUNCTION OF THE FORKS OF THE PLATTE.

into all sorts of fantastic forms by the rains and storms of ages, and have the appearance of an immense city of towers and castles. They are quite difficult to explore, as I learned by experience in an effort to pursue and kill mountain sheep or bighorn. These were seen in great numbers, but we failed to kill any, as they in-

Mountains to whom they might sell it. This was a surprise to many of us, as there had been no drinking on the way. John Gray was sent ahead to see if he could find a trapping party, and he was instructed, if successful, to have them come to a certain place on Green River. He struck a trail, and overtook a party on



FORT LARAMIE IN 1849.

habit places almost inaccessible and are exceedingly wild.

As we ascended the Platte buffaloes became scarcer, and on the Sweetwater none were to be seen. Now appeared in the distance to the north of west, gleaming under its mantle of perpetual snow, that lofty range known as the Wind River Mountains. It was the first time I had seen snow in summer; some of the peaks were very precipitous, and the view was altogether most impressive. Guided by Fitzpatrick, we crossed the Rockies at or near the South Pass, where the mountains were apparently low. Some years before a man named William Subletts, an Indian fur trader, went to the Rocky Mountains with goods in wagons, and those were the only wagons that had ever been there before us; sometimes we came across the tracks, but generally they were obliterated, and thus were of no service. Approaching Green River in the Rocky Mountains, it was found that some of the wagons, including Captain Bartleson's, had alcohol on board, and that the owners wanted to find trappers in the Rocky

their way to the buffalo region to lay in provisions, *i. e.*, buffalo meat, and they returned, and came and camped on Green River very soon after our arrival, buying the greater part, if not all, of the alcohol, it first having been diluted so as to make what they called whisky—three or four gallons of water to a gallon of alcohol. Years afterwards we heard of the fate of that party: they were attacked by Indians the very first night after they left us and several of them killed, including the captain of the trapping party, whose name was Frapp. The whisky was probably the cause.

Several years ago when I was going down Weber Cañon, approaching Salt Lake, swiftly borne along on an observation car amid cliffs and over rushing streams, something said that night at the camp-fire on Green River was forcibly recalled to mind. We had in our party an illiterate fellow named Bill Overton, who in the evening at one of the camp-fires loudly declared that nothing in his life had ever surprised him. Of course that raised a dispute. "Never surprised in your life?" "No, I never was surprised." And, moreover,

he swore that nothing ever *could* surprise him. "I should not be surprised," said he, "if I were to see a steamboat come plowing over these mountains this minute." In rattling down the cañon of Weber River it occurred to me that the reality was almost equal to Bill Overton's extravaganza, and I could but wonder what he would have said had he suddenly come upon this modern scene.

As I have said, at Soda Springs — at the northermost bend of Bear River — our party separated. It was a bright and lovely place. The abundance of soda water, including the intermittent gushing so-called Steamboat Spring; the beautiful fir and cedar covered hills; the huge piles of red or brown sinter, the result of fountains once active but then dry — all these, together with the river, lent a charm to its wild beauty and made the spot a notable one. Here the missionary party were to turn north and go into the Flathead nation. Fort Hall, about forty miles distant on Snake River, lay on their route. There was no road; but something like a trail, doubtless used by the trappers, led in that direction. From Fort Hall there was also a trail down Snake River, by which trapping parties reached the Columbia River and Fort Vancouver, the headquarters of the Hudson Bay Company.

Our party, originally sixty-nine, including women and children, had become lessened to sixty-four in number. One had accidentally shot and killed himself at the forks of the Platte. Another of our party, named Simpson, had left us at Fort Laramie. Three had turned back from Green River, intending to make their way to Fort Bridger and await an opportunity to return home. Their names were Peyton, Rodgers, and Amos E. Frye. Thirty-two of our party, becoming discouraged, decided not to venture without path or guide into the unknown and trackless region towards California, but concluded to go with the missionary party to Fort Hall and thence find their way down Snake and Columbia rivers into Oregon.<sup>1</sup> The rest of us — also thirty-two in number, including Benjamin Kelsey, his wife and little daughter — remained firm, refusing to be diverted from our original purpose of going direct to California. After getting all the information we could from Captain Fitzpatrick, we regretfully bade good-by to our fellow emigrants and to Father De Smet and his party.

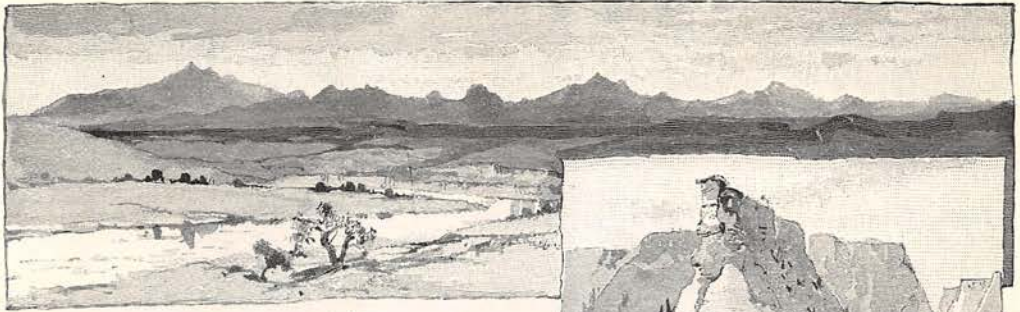
We were now thrown entirely upon our own resources. All the country beyond was to us

a veritable *terra incognita*, and we only knew that California lay to the west. Captain Fitzpatrick was not much better informed, but he had heard that parties had penetrated the country to the southwest and west of Salt Lake to trap for beaver; and by his advice four of our men went with the parties to Fort Hall to consult Captain Grant, who was in charge there, and to gain information. Meanwhile our depleted party slowly made its way down the west side of Bear River.

Our separation at Soda Springs recalls an incident. The days were usually very hot, the nights almost freezing. The first day our little company went only about ten miles and camped on Bear River. In company with a man named James John — always called "Jimmy John" — I wandered a mile or two down the river fishing. Seeing snow on a high mountain to the west we longed to reach it, for the heat where we were was intense. So, without losing time to get our guns or coats or to give notice at the camp, we started direct for the snow, with the impression that we could go and return by sundown. But there intervened a range of lower mountains, a certain peak of which seemed almost to touch the snow. Both of us were fleet of foot and made haste, but we only gained the summit of the peak about sundown. The distance must have been twelve or fifteen miles. A valley intervened, and the snow lay on a higher mountain beyond. I proposed to camp. But Jimmy gave me a disdainful look, as much as to say, "You are afraid to go," and quickened his gait into a run down the mountain towards the snow. I called to him to stop, but he would not even look back. A firm resolve seized me — to overtake him, but not again to ask him to return. We crossed the valley in the night, saw many Indian campfires, and gained a sharp ridge leading up to the snow. This was first brushy and then rough and rocky. The brush had no paths except those made by wild animals; the rocks were sharp, and soon cut through our moccasins and made our feet bleed. But up and up we went until long after midnight, and until a cloud covered the mountain. We were above the timber line, excepting a few stunted fir trees, under one of which we crawled to wait for day, for it was too dark to see. Day soon dawned, but we were almost frozen. Our fir-tree nest had been the lair of grizzly bears that had wallowed there and shed quantities of shaggy hair. The

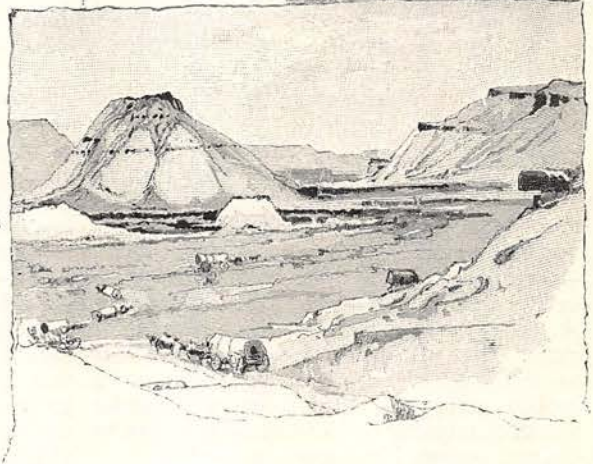
<sup>1</sup> Of the party leaving us at Soda Springs to go into Oregon I can now, after the lapse of forty-nine years, recall by their names only the following: Mr. Williams and wife; Samuel Kelsey, his wife and five children; Josiah Kelsey and wife; C. W. Flugge; Mr. Carroll; Mr. Fowler; a Methodist Episcopal preacher,

whose name I think was also Williams; "Cheyenne Dawson"; and another called "Bear Dawson." Subsequently we heard that the party safely arrived in Oregon, and some of them we saw in California. One (C. W. Flugge) was in time to join a party and come from Oregon to California the same year (1841).



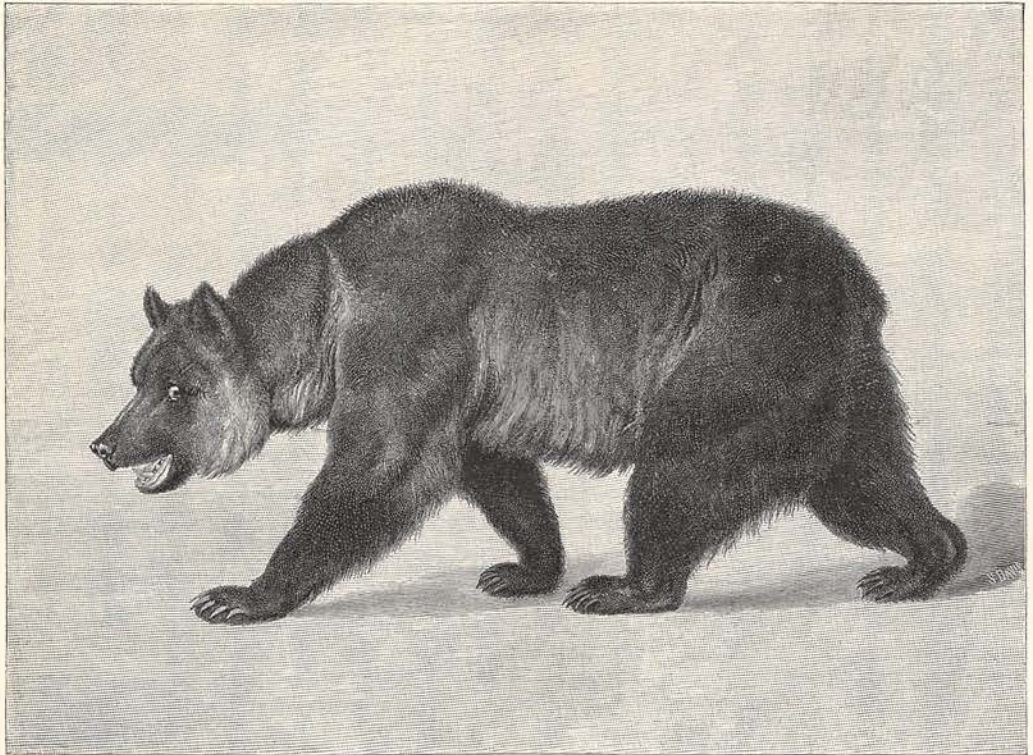
THE LARAMIE RANGE.

snow was still beyond, and we had lost both sight and direction. But in an hour or two we reached it. It was nearly as hard as ice. Filling a large handkerchief, without taking time to admire the scenery we started towards the camp by a new route, for our feet were too sore to go by way of the rocky ridge by which we had come. But the new way led into trouble. There were thickets so dense as to exclude the sun, and roaring little streams in deep, dark chasms; we had to crawl through paths which looked untrodden except by grizzlies; in one place a large bear had passed evidently only a few minutes before, crossing the deep gorge, plunging through the wild, dashing water, and wetting the steep bank as he went up. We carried our drawn butcher knives in our hands, for they were our only weapons. At last we emerged into the valley. Apparently numerous Indians had left that very morning, as shown by the tracks of lodge-poles drawn on the ground. Making haste, we soon gained the hills, and at about 2 P. M. sighted our wagons, already two or three miles on the march. When our friends saw us they stopped, and all who could ran to welcome us. They had given us up for lost, supposing that we had been killed by the hostile Blackfeet, who, as Captain Fitzpatrick had warned us, sometimes roamed through that region. The company had barricaded the camp at night as best they could, and every man had spent a sleepless night on guard. Next morning they passed several hours in scouring the country. Their first questions were: "Where have you been?" "Where have you been?" I was able to answer triumphantly, "*We have been up to the snow!*" and to demonstrate the fact by showing all the



1. THE PLATTE CAÑON. 2. BRIDGER'S FORD. 3. THE BAD LANDS OF THE OLD TRAIL NEAR DOUGLAS (NO VEGETATION). 4. ON THE OLD CALIFORNIA TRAIL OVER THE LA PRÉLE (BRANCH OF THE PLATTE).





THE GRIZZLY (*URSUS HORRIBILIS*). (FROM AN ORIGINAL PAINTING BY THE LATE CHARLES NAHL.)

snow I had left, which was now reduced to a ball about the size of my fist.

In about ten days our four men returned from Fort Hall, during which time we had advanced something over one hundred miles towards Salt Lake. They brought the information that we must strike out west of Salt Lake, — as it was even then called by the trappers, — being careful not to go too far south, lest we should get into a waterless country without grass. They also said we must be careful not to go too far north, lest we should get into a broken country and steep cañons, and wander about, as trapping parties had been known to do, and become bewildered and perish.

September had come before we reached Salt Lake, which we struck at its northern extremity. Part of the time we had purposely traveled slowly to enable the men from Fort Hall the sooner to overtake us. But unavoidable delays were frequent: daily, often hourly, the road had to be made passable for our wagons by digging down steep banks, filling gulches, etc. Indian fires obscured mountains and valleys in a dense, smoky atmosphere, so that we could not see any considerable distance in order to avoid obstacles. The principal growth, on plain and hill alike, was the interminable sage-brush (*Artemisia*), and often it was difficult, for

miles at a time, to break a road through it, and sometimes a lightly laden wagon would be overturned. Its monotonous dull color and scraggy appearance gave a most dreary aspect to the landscape. But it was not wholly useless: where large enough it made excellent fuel, and it was the home and shelter of the hare — generally known as the “jack rabbit” — and of the sage-hen. Trees were almost a sure sign of water in that region. But the mirage was most deceptive, magnifying stunted sage-brush on diminutive hillocks into trees and groves. Thus misled, we traveled all day without water, and at midnight found ourselves in a plain, level as a floor, incrusting with salt, and as white as snow. Crusts of salt broken up by our wagons, and driven by the chilly night wind like ice on the surface of a frozen pond, was to me a most striking counterfeit of a winter scene. This plain became softer and softer until our poor, almost famished, animals could not pull our wagons. In fact, we were going direct to Salt Lake and did not know it. So, in search of water, we turned from a southerly to an easterly course, and went about ten miles, and soon after daylight arrived at Bear River. So near to Salt Lake were we that the water in the river was too salt for us or our animals to use, but we had to use it; it would not

quench thirst, but it did save life. The grass looked most luxuriant, and sparkled as if covered with frost. But it was salt; our hungry, jaded animals refused to eat it, and we had to lie by a whole day to rest them before we could travel.

Leaving this camp and bearing northwest we crossed our tracks on the salt plain, having thus described a triangle of several miles in dimensions. One of the most serious of our troubles was to find water where we could camp at night. So soon came another hot day, and hard travel all day and all night without water! From a westerly course we turned directly north, and, guided by antelope trails, came in a few miles to an abundance of grass and good water. The condition of our animals compelled us to rest here nearly a week. Meanwhile two of the men who had been to Fort Hall went ahead to explore. Provisions were becoming scarce, and we saw that we must avoid unnecessary delay. The two men were gone about five days. Under their lead we set forth, bearing west, then southwest, around Salt Lake, then again west. After two or three fatiguing days,—one day and a night without water,—the first notice we had of approach to any considerable mountain was the sight of crags, dimly seen through the smoke, many hundred feet above our heads. Here was plenty of good grass and water. Nearly all now said, "Let us

saddles used by the trapping party, and had learned a little about how to make them. Packing is an art, and something that only an experienced mountaineer can do well so as to save his animal and keep his pack from falling off. We were unaccustomed to it, and the difficulties we had at first were simply indescribable. It is much more difficult to fasten a pack on an ox than on a mule or a horse. The trouble began the very first day. But we started—most of us on foot, for nearly all the animals, including several of the oxen, had to carry packs. It was but a few minutes before the packs began to turn; horses became scared, mules kicked, oxen jumped and bellowed, and articles were scattered in all directions. We took more pains, fixed things, made a new start, and did better, though packs continued occasionally to fall off and delay us.

Those that had better pack-saddles and had tied their loads securely were ahead, while the others were obliged to lag behind, because they had to repack, and sometimes things would be strewn all along the route. The first night I happened to be among those that kept pretty well back, because the horses out-traveled the oxen. The foremost came to a place and stopped where there was no water or grass, and built a fire so that we could see it and come up to them. We got there about midnight, but some of our oxen that had packs on had not come up, and among



MONUMENT POINT, SALT LAKE.

leave our wagons, otherwise the snows will overtake us before we get to California." So we stopped one day and threw away everything we could not carry, made pack-saddles and packed the oxen, mules, and horses, and started.

On Green River we had seen the style of pack-

them were my two. So I had to return the next morning and find them, Cheyenne Dawson alone volunteering to go with me. One man had brought along about a quart of water, which was carefully doled out before we started, each receiving a little canister-cover full—less



WATER!

than half a gill; but as Dawson and I had to go for the oxen, we were given a double portion. This was all the water I had until the next day. It was a burning hot day. We could not find the trail of the oxen for a long time, and Dawson refused to go any farther, saying that there were plenty of cattle in California; but I had to do it, for the oxen were carrying our provisions and other things. Afterwards I struck the trail, and found that the oxen instead of going west had gone north, and I followed them until nearly sundown. They had got into a grassy country, which showed that they were nearing water. Seeing Indian tracks on their trail following them, I felt there was imminent danger, and at once examined my gun and pistols to see that they were primed and ready. But soon I found my oxen lying down in tall

grass by the side of the trail. Seeing no Indians, I hastened to fasten the packs and make my way to overtake the company. They had promised to stop when they came to water and wait for me. I traveled all night, and at early dawn came to where there was plenty of water and where the company had taken their dinner the day before, but they had failed to stop for me according to promise. I was much perplexed, because I had seen many fires in the night, which I took to be Indian fires, so I fastened my oxen to a scraggy willow and began to make circles around to see which way the company had gone. The ground was so hard that the animals had made no impression, which bewildered me. Finally, while making a circle of about three miles away off to the south, I saw two men coming on horseback. In the

glare of the mirage, which distorted everything, I could not tell whether they were Indians or white men, but I supposed them to be Indians, feeling sure our party would go west and not south. In a mirage a man on horseback looks as tall as a tree, and I could only tell by the motion that they were mounted. I made a beeline to my oxen, to make breastworks of them. In doing this I came to a small stream resembling running water, into which I urged my horse, whereupon he went down into a quagmire, over head and ears, out of sight. My gun also went under the mire. I got hold of something on the bank, threw out my gun, which was full of mud and water, and holding to the rope attached to my horse, by dint of hard pulling I succeeded in getting him out—a sorry sight, his ears and eyes full of mud, and his body covered with it. At last, just in time, I was able to move and get behind the oxen. My gun was in no condition to shoot. However, putting dry powder in the pan I determined to do my best in case the supposed Indians should come up; but lo! they were two of our party coming to meet me, bringing water and provisions. It was a great relief. I felt indignant that the party had not stopped for me—not the less so when I learned that Captain Bartleson had said, when they started back to find me, that they “would be in better business to go ahead and look for a road.” He had not forgotten certain comments of mine on his qualities as a student of Indian character. An instance of this I will relate.

One morning, just as we were packing up, a party of about ninety Indians, on horseback, a regular war party, were descried coming up. Some of us begged the captain to send men out to prevent them from coming to us while we were in the confusion of packing. But he said, “Boys, you must not show any sign of hostility; if you go out there with guns the Indians will think us hostile, and may get mad and hurt us.” However, five or six of us took our guns and went out, and by signs made them halt. They did not prove to be hostile, but they had carbines, and if we had been careless and had let them come near they might, and probably would, have killed us. At last we got packed up and started, and the Indians traveled along three or four hundred yards one side or the other of us or behind us all day. They appeared anxious to trade, and offered a buckskin, well dressed, worth two or three dollars, for three or four charges of powder and three or four balls. This showed that they were in want of ammunition. The carbines indicated that they had had communication with some trading-post belonging to the Hudson’s Bay Company. They had buffalo-robbers also, which showed that they were a roving

hunting party, as there were no buffaloes within three or four hundred miles. At this time I had spoken my mind pretty freely concerning Captain Bartleson’s lack of judgment, as one could scarcely help doing under the circumstances.

We now got into a country where there was no grass nor water, and then we began to catch the men who had gone to Fort Hall. They repeated, “If you go too far south you will get into a desert country and your animals will perish; there will be no water nor grass.” We were evidently too far south. We could not go west, and the formation of the country was such that we had to turn and go north across a range of mountains. Having struck a small stream we camped upon it all night, and next day continued down its banks, crossing from side to side, most of the time following Indian paths or paths made by antelope and deer. In the afternoon we entered a cañon the walls of which were precipitous and several hundred feet high. Finally the pleasant bermy banks gave out entirely, and we could travel only in the dry bed of what in the wet season was a raging river. It became a solid mass of stones and huge boulders, and the animals became tender-footed and sore so that they could hardly stand up, and as we continued the way became worse and worse. There was no place for us to lie down and sleep, nor could our animals lie down; the water had given out, and the prospect was indeed gloomy—the cañon had been leading us directly north. All agreed that the animals were too jaded and worn to go back. Then we called the men: “What did they tell you at Fort Hall about the northern region?” They repeated, “You must not go too far north; if you do you will get into difficult cañons that lead towards the Columbia River, where you may become bewildered and wander about and perish.” This cañon was going nearly north; in fact it seemed a little east of north. We sent some men to see if they could reach the top of the mountain by scaling the precipice somewhere and get a view, and they came back about ten or eleven o’clock, saying the country looked better three or four miles farther ahead. So we were encouraged. Even the animals seemed to take courage, and we got along much better than had been thought possible, and by one o’clock that day came out on what is now known as the Humboldt River. It was not until four years later (1845) that General Frémont first saw this river and named it Humboldt.

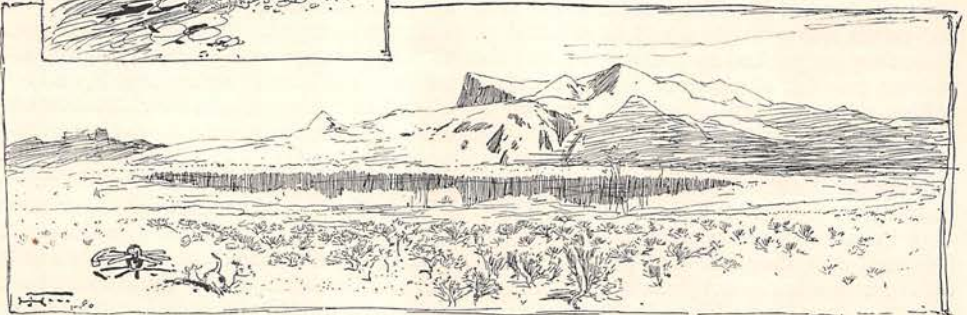
Our course was first westward and then southward, following this river for many days, till we came to its Sink, near which we saw a solitary horse, an indication that trappers had sometime been in that vicinity. We tried to catch him but failed; he had been there long enough

to become very wild. We saw many Indians on the Humboldt, especially towards the Sink. There were many tule marshes. The tule is a rush, large, but here not very tall. It was generally completely covered with honeydew, and this in turn was wholly covered with a pediculous-looking insect which fed upon it. The Indians gathered quantities of the honey and pressed it into balls about the size of one's fist, having the appearance of wet bran. At first we greatly relished this Indian food, but

when we saw what it was made of—that the insects pressed into the mass were the main ingredient—we lost our appetites and bought no more of it.

From the time we left our wagons many had to walk, and more and more as we advanced. Going down the Humboldt at least half were on foot. Provisions had given out; except a little coarse green grass among the willows along the river the country was dry, bare, and desolate; we saw no game except antelope, and they were scarce and hard to kill; and walking was very fatiguing. Tobacco lovers would surrender their animals for anyone to ride who would furnish them with an ounce or two to chew during the day. One day one of these devotees lost his tobacco and went back for it, but failed to find it. An Indian in a friendly manner overtook us, bringing the piece of tobacco, which he had found on our trail or at our latest camp, and surrendered it. The owner, instead of being thankful, accused the Indian of having stolen it—an impossibility, as we had seen no Indians or Indian signs for some days. Perhaps the Indian did not know what it was, else he might have kept it for smoking. But I think otherwise, for, patting his breast, he said, "Shoshone, Shoshone," which was the Indian way of showing he was friendly. The Shoshones were known as always friendly to the whites, and it is not difficult to see how other and distant tribes might claim to be Shoshones as a passport to favor.

On the Humboldt we had a further division of our ranks. In going down the river we went sometimes on one side and sometimes on the other, but mostly on the north side, till we were nearing what are now known as the Humboldt Mountains. We were getting tired, and some were in favor of leaving the oxen, of which we then had only about seven or eight, and rushing on into California. They said there was plenty of beef in California. But some of us said: "No; our oxen are now our only supply of food. We are doing well,



THE HUMBOLDT PALISADES.—THE HUMBOLDT SINK.



TRUCKEE MEADOWS.

making eighteen or twenty miles a day." One morning when it was my turn at driving the oxen, the captain traveled so fast that I could not keep up, and was left far behind. When night came I had to leave the trail and go over a rocky declivity for a mile and a half into a gloomy, damp bottom, and unpack the oxen and turn them out to eat, sleeping myself without blankets. I got up the next morning, hunted the oxen out of the willow thicket, and repacked them. Not having had supper or breakfast, and having to travel nine miles before I overtook the party, perhaps I was not in the best humor. They were waiting, and for the very good reason that they could have nothing to eat till I came up with the oxen and one could be killed. I felt badly treated, and let the captain know it plainly; but, much to my surprise, he made no reply, and none of his men said a word. We killed an ox, ate our breakfast, and got ready to start about one or two o'clock in the afternoon. When nearly ready to go, the captain and one or two of his mess came to us and said: "Boys, our animals are better than yours, and we always get out of meat before any of the rest of you. Let us have the most of the meat this time, and we will pay you back the next ox we kill." We gladly let them have all they wished. But as soon as they had taken it, and were mounted ready to start, the captain in a loud voice exclaimed: "Now we have been found fault with long enough, and we are going to California. If you can keep up with us, all right; if you cannot, you may go to —"; and away they started, the captain and eight men. One of the men would not go with the captain; he said, "The captain is wrong, and I will stay with you, boys."

In a short time they were out of sight. We followed their trail for two or three days, but after they had crossed over to the south side of the Humboldt and turned south we came into a sandy waste where the wind had entirely obliterated their tracks. We were then thrown entirely upon our own resources. It was our desire to make as great speed as

possible westward, deviating only when obstacles interposed, and in such case bearing south instead of north, so as to be found in a lower latitude in the event that winter should overtake us in the mountains. But, diverted by following our fugitive captain and party across the Humboldt, we thereby missed the luxuriant Truckee meadows lying but a short distance to the west, a resting-place well and favorably known to later emigrants. So, perforce, we followed down to the Sink of the Humboldt and were obliged to drink its water, which in the fall of the year becomes stagnant and of the color of lye, and not fit to drink or use unless boiled. Here we camped. Leaving the Sink of the Humboldt, we crossed a considerable stream which must have been Carson River, and came to another stream which must have been Walker River, and followed it up to where it came out of the mountains, which proved to be the Sierra Nevada. We did not know the name of the mountains. Neither had these rivers then been named; nor had they been seen by Kit Carson or Joe Walker, for whom they were named, nor were they seen until 1845 by Frémont, who named them.

We were now camped on Walker River, at the very eastern base of the Sierra Nevada, and had only two oxen left. We sent men ahead to see if it would be possible to scale the mountains, while we killed the better of the two oxen and dried the meat in preparation for the ascent. The men returned towards evening and reported that they thought it would be possible to ascend the mountains, though very difficult. We had eaten our supper, and were ready for the climb in the morning. Looking back on the plains we saw something coming, which we decided to be Indians. They traveled very slowly, and it was difficult to understand their movements. To make a long story short, it was the eight men that had left us nine days before. They had gone farther south than we and had come to a lake, probably Carson Lake, and there had found Indians who supplied them plentifully with fish and pine nuts. Fish caught in such water are not fit to

eat at any time, much less in the fall of the year. The men had all eaten heartily of fish and pine nuts, and had got something akin to cholera morbus. We were glad to see them although they had deserted us. We ran out to meet them and shook hands, and put

sible to get through down the smaller cañon. I was one of them, Jimmy John the other. Benjamin Kelsey, who had shown himself expert in finding the way, was now, without any election, still recognized as leader, as he had been during the absence of Bartleson. A party



ABANDONED.

our frying-pans on and gave them the best supper we could. Captain Bartleson, who when we started from Missouri was a portly man, was reduced to half his former girth. He said: "Boys, if ever I get back to Missouri I will never leave that country. I would gladly eat out of the troughs with my dogs." He seemed to be heartily sick of his late experience, but that did not prevent him from leaving us twice after that.

We were now in what is at present Nevada, and probably within forty miles of the present boundary of California. We ascended the mountains on the north side of Walker River to the summit, and then struck a stream running west which proved to be the extreme source of the Stanislaus River. We followed it down for several days and finally came to where a branch ran into it, each forming a cañon. The main river flowed in a precipitous gorge in places apparently a mile deep, and the gorge that came into it was but little less formidable. At night we found ourselves on the extreme point of the promontory between the two, very tired, and with neither grass nor water. We had to stay there that night. Early the next morning two men went down to see if it would be pos-

sible to get through down the smaller cañon. The understanding was, that when we went down the cañon if it was practicable to get through we were to fire a gun so that all could follow; but if not, we were not to fire, even if we saw game. When Jimmy and I got down about three-quarters of a mile I came to the conclusion that it was impossible to get through, and said to him, "Jimmy, we might as well go back; we can't go here." "Yes, we can," said he; and insisting that we could, he pulled out a pistol and fired. It was an old dragoon pistol, and reverberated like a cannon. I hurried back to tell the company not to come down, but before I reached them the captain and his party had started. I explained, and warned them that they could not get down; but they went on as far as they could go, and then were obliged to stay all day and night to rest the animals, and had to go about among the rocks and pick a little grass for them, and go down to the stream through a terrible place in the cañon to bring water up in cups and camp-kettles, and some of the men in their boots, to pour down the animals' throats in order to keep them from perishing. Finally, four of them

pulling and four of them pushing a mule, they managed to get them up one by one, and then carried all the things up again on their backs — not an easy job for exhausted men.

In some way, nobody knows how, Jimmy got through that cañon and into the Sacramento Valley. He had a horse with him — an Indian horse that was bought in the Rocky Mountains, and which could come as near climbing a tree as any horse I ever knew. Jimmy was a character. Of all men I have ever known I think he was the most fearless; he had the bravery of a bulldog. He was not seen for two months — until he was found at Sutter's, afterwards known as Sutter's Fort, now Sacramento City.

We went on, traveling west as near as we could. When we killed our last ox we shot and ate crows or anything we could kill, and one man shot a wild-cat. We could eat anything. One day in the morning I went ahead, on foot of course, to see if I could kill something, it being understood that the company would keep on as near west as possible and find a practicable road. I followed an Indian trail down into the cañon, meeting many Indians on the way up. They did not molest me, but I did not quite like their looks. I went about ten miles down the cañon, and then began to think it time to strike north to intersect the trail of the company going west. A most difficult time I had scaling the precipice. Once I threw my gun up ahead of me, being unable to hold it and climb, and then was in despair lest I could not get up where it was, but finally I did barely manage to do so, and made my way north. As the darkness came on I was obliged to look down and feel with my feet lest I should pass over the trail of the party without seeing it. Just at dark I came to an enormous fallen tree and tried to go around the top, but the place was too brushy, so I went around the butt, which seemed to me to be about twenty or twenty-five feet above my head. This I suppose to have been one of the fallen trees in the Calaveras Grove of *Sequoia gigantea* or mammoth trees, as I have since been there, and to my own satisfaction identified the lay of the land and the tree. Hence I concluded that I must have been the first white man who ever saw the *Sequoia gigantea*, of which I told Frémont when he came to California in 1844. Of course sleep was impossible, for I had neither blanket nor coat, and burned or froze alternately as I turned from one side to the other before the small fire which I had built, until morning, when I started eastward to intersect the trail, thinking the company had turned north. But I traveled until noon and found no trail; then striking south, I came to the camp which I had left the previous

morning. The party had gone, but not where they had said they would go; for they had taken the same trail I had followed, into the cañon, and had gone up the south side, which they had found so steep that many of the poor animals could not climb it and had to be left. When I arrived the Indians were there cutting the horses to pieces and carrying off the meat. My situation, alone among strange Indians killing our poor horses, was by no means comfortable. Afterward we found that these Indians were always at war with the Californians. They were known as the Horse Thief Indians, and lived chiefly on horse flesh; they had been in the habit of raiding the ranches even to the very coast, driving away horses by the hundreds into the mountains to eat. That night after dark I overtook the party in camp.

A day or two later we came to a place where there was a great quantity of horse bones, and we did not know what it meant; we thought that an army must have perished there. They were of course horses that the Indians had driven in there and slaughtered. A few nights later, fearing depredations, we concluded to stand guard — all but one man, who would not. So we let his two horses roam where they pleased. In the morning they could not be found. A few miles away we came to a village; the Indians had fled, but we found the horses killed and some of the meat roasting on a fire.

We were now on the edge of the San Joaquin Valley, but we did not even know that we were in California. We could see a range of mountains lying to the west, — the Coast Range, — but we could see no valley. The evening of the day we started down into the valley we were very tired, and when night came our party was strung along for three or four miles, and every man slept right where darkness overtook him. He would take off his saddle for a pillow and turn his horse or mule loose, if he had one. His animal would be too poor to walk away, and in the morning he would find him, usually within fifty feet. The jaded horses nearly perished with hunger and fatigue. When we overtook the foremost of the party the next morning we found they had come to a pond of water, and one of them had killed a fat coyote; when I came up it was all eaten except the lights and the windpipe, on which I made my breakfast. From that camp we saw timber to the north of us, evidently bordering a stream running west. It turned out to be the stream that we had followed down in the mountains — the Stanislaus River. As soon as we came in sight of the bottom land of the stream we saw an abundance of antelopes and sandhill cranes. We killed two of each the first evening.



Wild grapes also abounded. The next day we killed thirteen deer and antelopes, jerked the meat and got ready to go on, all except the captain's mess of seven or eight, who decided to stay there and lay in meat enough to last them into California! We were really almost down to tidewater, but did not know it. Some thought it was five hundred miles yet to California. But all thought we had to cross at least that range of mountains in sight to the west before entering the promised land, and how many more beyond no one could tell. Nearly all thought it best to press on lest the snows might overtake us in the mountains before us, as they had already nearly done on the mountains behind us (the Sierra Nevada). It was now about the first of November. Our party set forth bearing northwest, aiming for a seeming gap north of a high mountain in the chain to the west of us. That mountain we found to be Mount Diablo. At night the Indians attacked the captain's camp and stole all their animals, which were the best in the company, and the next day the men had to overtake us with just what they could carry in their hands.

The next day, judging by the timber we saw, we concluded there was a river to the west. So two men went ahead to see if they could

find a trail or a crossing. The timberseen proved to be along what is now known as the San Joaquin River. We sent two men on ahead to spy out the country. At night one of them returned, saying they had come across an Indian on horseback without a saddle who wore a cloth jacket but no other clothing. From what they could understand the Indian knew Dr. Marsh and had offered to guide them to his place. He plainly said "Marsh," and of course we supposed it was the Dr. Marsh before referred to who had written the letter to a friend in Jackson County, Missouri, and so it proved. One man went with the Indian to Marsh's ranch and the other came back to tell us what he had done, with the suggestion that we should go on and cross the river (San Joaquin) at the place to which the trail was leading. In that way we found ourselves two days later at Dr. Marsh's ranch, and there we learned that we were really in California and our journey at an end. After six months we had now arrived at the first settlement in California, November 4, 1841.

The account of our reception, and of my own experiences in California in the pastoral period before the gold discovery, I must reserve for another paper.

*John Bidwell.*

## CALIFORNIANA.

### Grizzly and Pioneer.

A GREAT many persons have told stories about grizzlies and about pioneers. But there is an aspect in which the grizzly and the pioneer may be said to represent the beginnings of a chapter of national folklore, or the first halting steps towards the development of a noble myth.

I remember that an old silver-freighter who walked all day long for many successive weeks across the Nevada desert, beside his high ore-wagon, once said to me: "I had a curious notion lately. I thought that, perhaps, when the American frontiersman had been dead a hundred thousand years, the stories that would be written and believed about him would be like those of the demigods." My old silver-freighter was well educated, and knew his mythology better than I did. He had full faith, too, in the permanence of the myth-making spirit. "Some fellow, I don't know who," he said, "has got to stand right out to represent all this pioneering that hundreds of us have been doing for generations. It may be a fellow with buckskins and a Kentucky rifle, or it may be a fellow with a slouch hat and a mule-whip. We can't any of us tell yet awhile." Ten years later the railroad reached the camp; he bought a small California farm and settled down, as miners, prospectors, stage-drivers, and frontiersmen of every class are doing all the time.

I have often meditated upon the idea which the old teamster of the desert had evolved, in his crude way,

feeling, far better than he could express it, the influence of the fast-passing epoch. As I consider the subject, two things, the grizzly and the California pioneer, seem on the way to take such form as to outlast railroads and cities. In a lesser sense they already belong together in literature, but perhaps they are slowly and surely assuming places side by side, or at least in the same group, in a new myth of the American continent. In the course of time—in five centuries, or twenty centuries—it may be that two giant shadows of the past, the Argonaut and his grizzly, will loom up over the Sierras, as Hercules and his Nemean lion in the legends of the Greeks.

No man is ever able to say of those things which lie within the present reality: "This is to perish; that is to broaden and grow, striking roots into universal nature until all men bear witness to its immortality." Nevertheless, when the last grizzly has perished, when the old race of miners is as far lost in traditions as the first Cornishman who picked up stream-tin, or the first iron-smelters of the Andreaswald who fought the Saxon invaders, when the great Californian valleys and all the shining slopes of the long, parallel mountain ranges beside the Pacific are clothed with continuous gardens and orchards, and mighty and populous cities grow from the villages of to-day, there ought to be a background of sublime fable to inspire poet, artist, and sculptor.

It is the first step towards a myth that always proves the most difficult. Already, the world over, men have come to know the old cañon-keeper and forest-dweller