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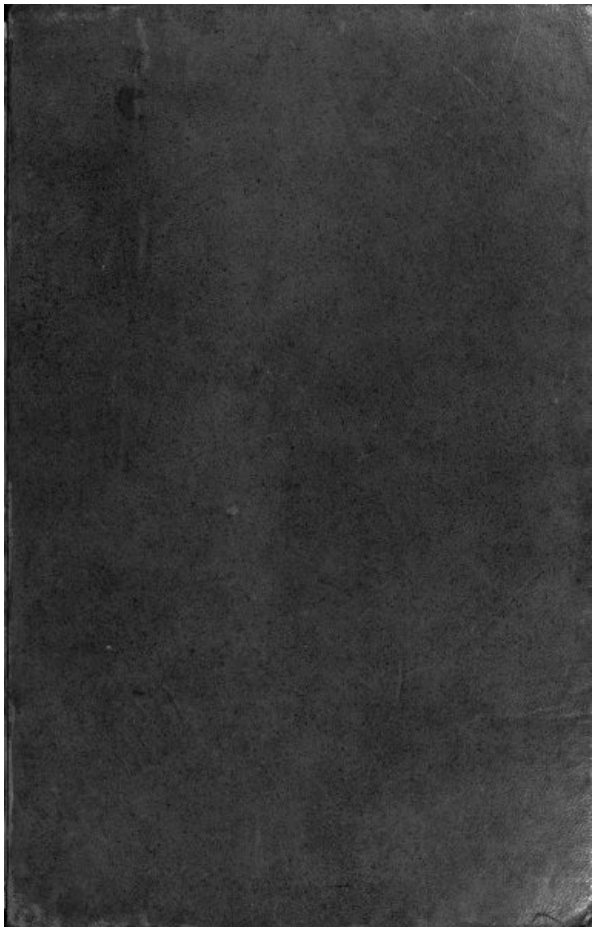

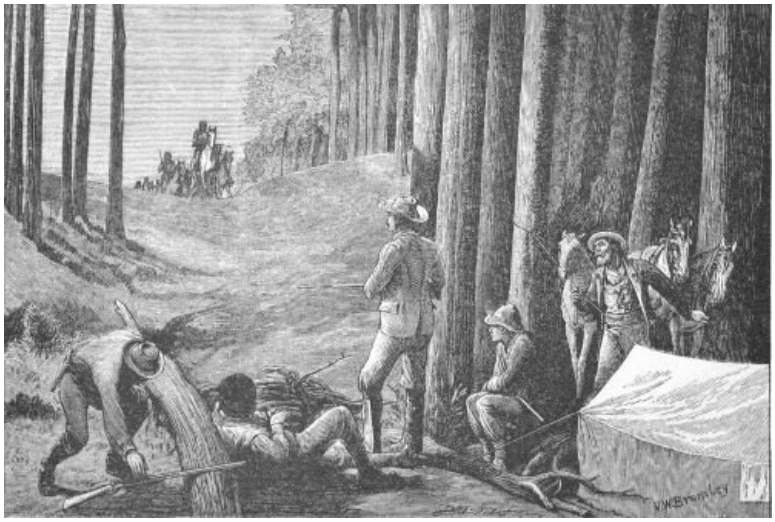

ENGLISH TOURISTS' CAMP—DOUBTFUL FRIENDS.

ELEVEN YEARS

IN THE

ROCKY MOUNTAINS

AND

LIFE ON THE FRONTIER.

By FRANCES F. VICTOR.

ALSO

A History of the Sioux War,

AND A LIFE OF

GEN. GEORGE A. CUSTER

WITH FULL ACCOUNT OF HIS LAST BATTLE.

ILLUSTRATED BY ENGRAVINGS AND MAPS.

PUBLISHED BY SUBSCRIPTION ONLY.

COLUMBIAN BOOK COMPANY,
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PART I.

MOUNTAIN ADVENTURES

AND

FRONTIER LIFE.

INTRODUCTION.

When the author of this book has been absorbed in the elegant narratives of Washington Irving, reading and musing over *Astoria* and *Bonneville*, in the cozy quiet of a New York study, no prescient motion of the mind ever gave prophetic indication of that personal acquaintance which has since been formed with the scenes, and even with some of the characters which figure in the works just referred to. Yet so have events shaped themselves that to me Astoria is familiar ground; Forts Vancouver and Walla-Walla pictured forever in my memory; while such journeys as I have been enabled to make into the country east of the last named fort, have given me a fair insight into the characteristic features of its mountains and its plains.

To-day, a railroad traverses the level stretch between the Missouri River and the Rocky Mountains, along which, thirty years ago, the fur-traders had worn a trail by their annual excursions with men, pack-horses, and sometimes wagons, destined to the Rocky Mountains. Then, they had to guard against the attacks of the Savages; and in this respect civilization is behind the railroad, for now, as then, it is not safe to travel without a sufficient escort. To-day, also, we have new Territories called by several names cut out of the identical hunting-grounds of the fur-traders of thirty years ago; and steamboats plying the rivers where the mountain-men came to set their traps for beaver; or cities growing up like mushrooms from a soil made quick by [Pg ix] gold, where the hardy mountain-hunter pursued the buffalo herds in search of his winter's supply of food.

The wonderful romance which once gave enchantment to stories of hardship and of daring deeds, suffered and done in these then distant wilds, is fast being dissipated by the rapid settlement of the new Territories, and by the familiarity of the public mind with tales of stirring adventure encountered in the search for glittering ores. It was, then, not without an emotion of pleased surprise that I first encountered in the fertile plains of Western Oregon the subject of this biography, a man fifty-eight years of age, of fine appearance and buoyant temper, full of anecdote, and with a memory well stored with personal recollections of all the men of note who have formerly visited the old Oregon Territory, when it comprised the whole country west of the Rocky Mountains lying north of California and south of the forty-ninth parallel. This man is *Joseph L. Meek*, to whose stories of mountain-life I have listened for days together; and who, after having figured conspicuously, and not without considerable fame, in the early history of Oregon, still prides himself most of all on having been a "mountain-man."

It has frequently been suggested to Mr. Meek, who has now come to be known by the familiar title of "Uncle Joe" to all Oregon, that a history of his varied adventures would make a readable book, and some of his neighbors have even undertaken to become his historian, yet with so little well-directed efforts that the task after all has fallen to a comparative stranger. I confess to having taken hold of it with some doubts as to my claims to the office; and the best recommendation I can give my work is the interest I myself felt in the subject of it; and the only apology I can offer for anything incredible in the narrative which it may contain, is that I "tell the tale as [Pg x] 'twas told to me," and that I have no occasion to doubt the truth of it.

Seeing that the incidents I had to record embraced a period of a score and a half of years, and that they extended over those years most interesting in Oregon history, as well as of the history of the Fur Trade in the West, I have concluded to preface Mr. Meek's adventures with a sketch of the latter, believing that the information thus conveyed to the reader will give an additional degree of interest to their narration. The impression made upon my own mind as I gained a knowledge of the facts which I shall record in this book relating to the early occupation of Oregon, was that they were not only profoundly romantic, but decidedly unique.

Mr. Meek was born in Washington Co., Virginia, in 1810, one year before the settlement of *Astoria*, and at a period when Congress was much interested in the question of our Western possessions and their boundary. "Manifest destiny" seemed to have raised him up, together with many others, bold, hardy, and fearless men, to

become sentinels on the outposts of civilization, securing to the United States with comparative ease a vast extent of territory, for which, without them, a long struggle with England would have taken place, delaying the settlement of the Pacific Coast for many years, if not losing it to us altogether. It is not without a feeling of genuine self-congratulation, that I am able to bear testimony to the services, hitherto hardly recognized, of the "mountain-men" who have settled in Oregon. Whenever there shall arise a studious and faithful historian, their names shall not be excluded from honorable mention, nor least illustrious will appear that of Joseph L. Meek, the Rocky Mountain Hunter and Trapper.

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PREFATORY CHAPTER.

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In the year 1818, Mr. Prevost, acting for the United States, received Astoria back from the British, who had taken possession, as narrated by Mr. Irving, four years previous. The restoration took place in conformity with the treaty of Ghent, by which those places captured during the war were restored to their original possessors. Mr. Astor stood ready at that time to renew his enterprise on the Columbia River, had Congress been disposed to grant him the necessary protection which the undertaking required. Failing to secure this, when the United States sloop of war Ontario sailed away from Astoria, after having taken formal possession of that place for our Government, the country was left to the occupancy, (scarcely a joint-occupancy, since there were then no Americans here,) of the British traders. After the war, and while negotiations were going on between Great Britain and the United States, the fort at Astoria had remained in possession of the North-West Company, as their principal establishment west of the mountains. It had been considerably enlarged since it had come into their possession, and was furnished with artillery enough to have frightened into friendship a much more warlike people than the subjects of old king Comcomly; who, it will be remembered, was not at first very well disposed towards the "King George men," having learned to look upon the "Boston men" as his friends in his earliest intercourse with the whites. At this time Astoria, or *Fort George*, as the British traders called it, contained sixty-five inmates, twenty-three of whom were whites, and the remainder Canadian half-breeds and Sandwich Islanders. Besides this number of men, there were a few women, the native wives of the men, and their half-breed offspring. The situation of Astoria, however, was not favorable, being near the sea coast, and not surrounded with good farming lands such as were required for the furnishing of provisions to the fort. Therefore, when in 1821 it was destroyed by fire, it was only in part rebuilt, but a better and more convenient location for the headquarters of the North-West Company was sought for in the interior.

About this time a quarrel of long standing between the Hudson's Bay and North-West Companies culminated in a battle between their men in the Red River country, [Pg 24] resulting in a considerable loss of life and property. This affair drew the attention of the Government at home; the rights of the rival companies were examined into, the mediation of the Ministry secured, and a compromise effected, by which the North-West Company, which had succeeded in dispossessing the Pacific Fur Company under Mr. Astor, was merged into the Hudson's Bay Company, whose name and fame are so familiar to all the early settlers of Oregon.

At the same time, Parliament passed an act by which the hands of the consolidated company were much strengthened, and the peace and security of all persons greatly insured; but which became subsequently, in the joint occupancy of the country, a cause of offence to the American citizens, as we shall see hereafter. This act allowed the commissioning of Justices of the Peace in all the territories not belonging to the United States, nor already subject to grants. These justices were to execute and enforce the laws and decisions of the courts of Upper Canada; to take evidence, and commit and send to Canada for trial the guilty; and even in some cases, to hold courts themselves for the trial of criminal offences and misdemeanors not punishable with death, or of civil causes in which the amount at issue should not exceed two hundred pounds.

Thus in 1824, the North-West Company, whose perfidy had occasioned such loss and mortification to the enterprising New York merchant, became itself a thing of the past, and a new rule began in the region west of the Rocky Mountains. The old fort at Astoria having been only so far rebuilt as to answer the needs of the hour, after due consideration, a site for head-quarters was selected about one hundred miles from the sea, near the mouth of the Wallamet River, though opposite to it. Three considerations went to make up the eligibility of the point selected. First, it was desirable, even necessary, to settle upon good agricultural lands, where the Company's provisions could be raised by the Company's servants. Second, it was important that the spot chosen should be upon waters navigable for the Company's vessels, or upon tide-water. Lastly, and not leastly, the Company had an eye to the boundary question between Great Britain and the United States; and believing that the end of the controversy would probably be to make the Columbia River the northern limit of the United States territory, a spot on the northern bank of that river was considered a good point for their fort, and possible future city.

The site chosen by the North-West Company in 1821, for their new fort, combined all these advantages, and the further one of having been already commenced and named. Fort Vancouver became at once on the accession of the Hudson's Bay Company, the metropolis of the northwest coast, the center of the fur trade, and the seat of government for that immense territory, over which roamed the hunters and trappers in the employ of that powerful corporation. This post was situated on the edge of a beautiful sloping plain on the northern bank of the Columbia, about six miles above the upper mouth of the Wallamet. At this point the Columbia spreads to a great width, and is divided on the south side into bayous by long sandy islands, covered with oak, ash, and cotton-wood trees, making the noble river more attractive still by adding the charm of curiosity concerning its actual breadth to its natural and

ordinary magnificence. Back of the fort the land rose gently, covered with forests of fir; and away to the east swelled the foot-hills of the Cascade range, then the mountains themselves, draped in filmy azure, and over-topped five thousand feet by the snowy cone of Mt. Hood. [Pg 25]

In this lonely situation grew up, with the dispatch which characterized the acts of the Company, a fort in most respects similar to the original one at Astoria. It was not, however, thought necessary to make so great a display of artillery as had served to keep in order the subjects of Comcomly. A stockade enclosed a space about eight hundred feet long by five hundred broad, having a bastion at one corner, where were mounted three guns, while two eighteen pounders and two swivels were planted in front of the residence of the Governor and chief factors. These commanded the main entrance to the fort, besides which there were two other gates in front, and another in the rear. Military precision was observed in the precautions taken against surprises, as well as in all the rules of the place. The gates were opened and closed at certain hours, and were always guarded. No large number of Indians were permitted within the enclosure at the same time, and every employee at the fort knew and performed his duty with punctuality.

The buildings within the stockade were the Governor's and chief factors' residences, stores, offices, work-shops, magazines, warehouses, &c.

Year by year, up to 1835 or '40, improvements continued to go on in and about the fort, the chief of which was the cultivation of the large farm and garden outside the enclosure, and the erection of a hospital building, large barns, servants' houses, and a boat-house, all outside of the fort; so that at the period when the Columbia River was a romance and a mystery to the people of the United States, quite a flourishing and beautiful village adorned its northern shore, and that too erected and sustained by the enemies of American enterprise on soil commonly believed to belong to the United States: fair foes the author firmly believes them to have been in those days, yet foes nevertheless.

The system on which the Hudson's Bay Company conducted its business was the result of long experience, and was admirable for its method and its justice also. When a young man entered its service as a clerk, his wages were small for several years, increasing only as his ability and good conduct entitled him to advancement. When his salary had reached one hundred pounds sterling he became eligible to a chief-tradership as a partner in the concern, from which position he was promoted to the rank of a chief factor. No important business was ever intrusted to an inexperienced person, a policy which almost certainly prevented any serious errors. A regular tariff was established on the Company's goods, comprising all the articles used in their trade with the Indians; nor was the quality of their goods ever allowed to deteriorate. A price was also fixed upon furs according to their market value, and an Indian knowing this, knew exactly what he could purchase. No bartering was allowed. When skins were offered for sale at the fort they were handed to the clerk through a window like a post-office delivery-window, and their value in the article desired, returned through the same aperture. All these regulations were of the highest importance to the good order, safety, and profit of the Company. The confidence of the Indians was sure to be gained by the constancy and good faith always observed toward them, and the Company obtained thereby numerous and powerful allies in nearly all the tribes. [Pg 26]

As soon as it was possible to make the change, the Indians were denied the use of intoxicating drinks, the appetite for which had early been introduced among them by coasting vessels, and even continued by the Pacific Fur Company at Astoria. It would have been dangerous to have suddenly deprived them of the coveted stimulus; therefore the practice must be discontinued by many wise arts and devices. A public notice was given that the sale of it would be stopped, and the reasons for this prohibition explained to the Indians. Still, not to come into direct conflict with their appetites, a little was sold to the chiefs, now and then, by the clerks, who affected to be running the greatest risks in violating the order of the company. The strictest secrecy was enjoined on the lucky chief who, by the friendship of some under-clerk, was enabled to smuggle off a bottle under his blanket. But the cunning clerk had generally managed to get his "good friend" into a state so cleverly between drunk and sober, before he entrusted him with the precious bottle, that he was sure to betray himself. Leaving the shop with a mien even more erect than usual, with a gait affected in its majesty, and his blanket tightened around him to conceal his secret treasure, the chuckling chief would start to cross the grounds within the fort. If he was a new customer, he was once or twice permitted to play his little game with the obliging clerk whose particular friend he was, and to escape detection.

But by-and-by, when the officers had seen the offence repeated more than once from their purposely contrived posts of observation, one of them would skillfully chance to intercept the guilty chief at whose comical endeavors to appear sober he was inwardly laughing, and charge him with being intoxicated. Wresting away the tightened blanket, the bottle appeared as evidence that could not be controverted, of the duplicity of the Indian and the unfaithfulness of the clerk, whose name was

instantly demanded, that he might be properly punished. When the chief again visited the fort, his particular friend met him with a sorrowful countenance, reproaching him for having been the cause of his disgrace and loss. This reproach was the surest means of preventing another demand for rum, the Indian being too magnanimous, probably, to wish to get his friend into trouble; while the clerk affected to fear the consequences too much to be induced to take the risk another time. Thus by kind and careful means the traffic in liquors was at length broken up, which otherwise would have ruined both Indian and trader.

To the company's servants liquor was sold or allowed at certain times: to those on the sea-board, one half-pint two or three times a year, to be used as medicine,—not that it was always needed or used for this purpose, but too strict inquiry into its use was wisely avoided,—and for this the company demanded pay. To their servants in the interior no liquor was sold, but they were furnished as a gratuity with one pint on leaving rendezvous, and another on arriving at winter quarters. By this management, it became impossible for them to dispose of drink to the Indians; their small allowance being always immediately consumed in a meeting or parting carouse. [Pg 27]

The arrival of men from the interior at Fort Vancouver usually took place in the month of June, when the Columbia was high, and a stirring scene it was. The chief traders generally contrived their march through the upper country, their camps, and their rendezvous, so as to meet the Express which annually came to Vancouver from Canada and the Red River settlements. They then descended the Columbia together, and arrived in force at the Fort. This annual fleet went by the name of Brigade—a name which suggested a military spirit in the crews that their appearance failed to vindicate. Yet, though there was nothing warlike in the scene, there was much that was exciting, picturesque, and even brilliant; for these *couriers de bois*, or wood-rangers, and the *voyageurs*, or boatmen, were the most foppish of mortals when they came to rendezvous. Then, too, there was an exaltation of spirits on their safe arrival at head-quarters, after their year's toil and danger in wildernesses, among Indians and wild beasts, exposed to famine and accident, that almost deprived them of what is called "common sense," and compelled them to the most fantastic excesses.

Their well-understood peculiarities did not make them the less welcome at Vancouver. When the cry was given—"the Brigade! the Brigade!"—there was a general rush to the river's bank to witness the spectacle. In advance came the chief-trader's barge, with the company's flag at the bow, and the cross of St. George at the stern: the fleet as many abreast as the turnings of the river allowed. With strong and skillful strokes the boatmen governed their richly laden boats, keeping them in line, and at the same time singing in chorus a loud and not unmusical hunting or boating song. The gay ribbons and feathers with which the singers were bedecked took nothing from the picturesqueness of their appearance. The broad, full river, sparkling in the sunlight, gemmed with emerald islands, and bordered with a rich growth of flowering shrubbery; the smiling plain surrounding the Fort; the distant mountains, where glittered the sentinel Mt. Hood, all came gracefully into the picture, and seemed to furnish a fitting back-ground and middle distance for the bright bit of coloring given by the moving life in the scene. As with a skillful sweep the brigade touched the bank, and the traders and men sprang on shore, the first cheer which had welcomed their appearance was heartily repeated, while a gay clamor of questions and answers followed.

After the business immediately incident to their arrival had been dispatched, then took place the regale of pork, flour, and spirits, which was sure to end in a carouse, during which blackened eyes and broken noses were not at all uncommon; but though blood was made to flow, life was never put seriously in peril, and the belligerent parties were the best of friends when the fracas was ended.

The business of exchange being completed in three or four weeks—the rich stores of peltries consigned to their places in the warehouse, and the boats reladen with goods for the next year's trade with the Indians in the upper country, a parting carouse took place, and with another parade of feathers, ribbons, and other finery, the brigade departed with songs and cheers as it had come, but with probably heavier hearts. [Pg 28]

It would be a stern morality indeed which could look upon the excesses of this peculiar class as it would upon the same excesses committed by men in the enjoyment of all the comforts and pleasures of civilized life. For them, during most of the year, was only an out-door life of toil, watchfulness, peril, and isolation. When they arrived at the rendezvous, for the brief period of their stay they were allowed perfect license because nothing else would content them. Although at head-quarters they were still in the wilderness, thousands of miles from civilization, with no chance of such recreations as men in the continual enjoyment of life's sweetest pleasures would naturally seek. For them there was only one method of seeking and finding temporary oblivion of the accustomed hardship; and whatever may be the strict rendering of man's duty as an immortal being, we cannot help being somewhat lenient at times to his errors as a mortal.

After the departure of the boats, there was another arrival at the Fort, of trappers from the Snake River country. Previous to 1832, such were the dangers of the fur trade in this region, that only the most experienced traders were suffered to conduct a party through it; and even they were frequently attacked, and sometimes sustained serious losses of men and animals. Subsequently, however, the Hudson's Bay Company obtained such an influence over even these hostile tribes as to make it safe for a party of no more than two of their men to travel through this much dreaded region.

There was another important arrival at Fort Vancouver, usually in midsummer. This was the Company's supply ship from London. In the possible event of a vessel being lost, one cargo was always kept on store at Vancouver; but for which wise regulation much trouble and disaster might have resulted, especially in the early days of the establishment. Occasionally a vessel foundered at sea or was lost on the bar of the Columbia; but these losses did not interrupt the regular transaction of business. The arrival of a ship from London was the occasion of great bustle and excitement also. She brought not only goods for the posts throughout the district of the Columbia, but letters, papers, private parcels, and all that seemed of so much value to the little isolated world at the Fort.

A company conducting its business with such method and regularity as has been described, was certain of success. Yet some credit also must attach to certain individuals in its service, whose faithfulness, zeal, and ability in carrying out its designs, contributed largely to its welfare. Such a man was at the head of the Hudson's Bay Company's affairs in the large and important district west of the Rocky Mountains. The Company never had in its service a more efficient man than Gov. John McLaughlin, more commonly called Dr. McLaughlin.

To the discipline, at once severe and just, which Dr. McLaughlin maintained in his district, was due the safety and prosperity of the company he served, and the servants of that company generally; as well as, at a later period, of the emigration which followed the hunter and trapper into the wilds of Oregon. Careful as were all [Pg 29] the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, they could not always avoid conflicts with the Indians; nor was their kindness and justice always sufficiently appreciated to prevent the outbreak of savage instincts. Fort Vancouver had been threatened in an early day; a vessel or two had been lost in which the Indians were suspected to have been implicated; at long intervals a trader was murdered in the interior; or more frequently, Indian insolence put to the test both the wisdom and courage of the officers to prevent an outbreak.

When murders and robberies were committed, it was the custom at Fort Vancouver to send a strong party to demand the offenders from their tribe; Such was the well known power and influence of the Company, and such the wholesome fear of the "King George men," that this demand was never resisted, and if the murderer could be found he was given up to be hung according to "King George" laws. They were almost equally impelled to good conduct by the state of dependence on the company into which they had been brought. Once they had subsisted and clothed themselves from the spoils of the rivers and forest; since they had tasted of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they could no more return to skins for raiment, nor to game alone for food. Blankets and flour, beads, guns, and ammunition had become dear to their hearts: for all these things they must love and obey the Hudson's Bay Company. Another fine stroke of policy in the Company was to destroy the chieftainships in the various tribes; thus weakening them by dividing them and preventing dangerous coalitions of the leading spirits: for in savage as well as civilized life, the many are governed by the few.

It may not be uninteresting in this place to give a few anecdotes of the manner in which conflicts with the Indians were prevented, or offences punished by the Hudson's Bay Company. In the year 1828 the ship *William and Ann* was cast away just inside the bar of the Columbia, under circumstances which seemed to direct suspicion to the Indians in that vicinity. Whether or not they had attacked the ship, not a soul was saved from the wreck to tell how she was lost. On hearing that the ship had gone to pieces, and that the Indians had appropriated a portion of her cargo, Dr. McLaughlin sent a message to the chiefs, demanding restitution of the stolen goods. Nothing was returned by the messenger except one or two worthless articles. Immediately an armed force was sent to the scene of the robbery with a fresh demand for the goods, which the chiefs, in view of their spoils, thought proper to resist by firing upon the reclaiming party. But they were not unprepared; and a swivel was discharged to let the savages know what they might expect in the way of firearms. The argument was conclusive, the Indians fleeing into the woods. While making search for the goods, a portion of which were found, a chief was observed skulking near, and cocking his gun; on which motion one of the men fired, and he fell. This prompt action, the justice of which the Indians well understood, and the intimidating power of the swivel, put an end to the incipient war. Care was then taken to impress upon their minds that they must not expect to profit by the disasters of vessels, nor be tempted to murder white men for the sake of plunder. The *William*

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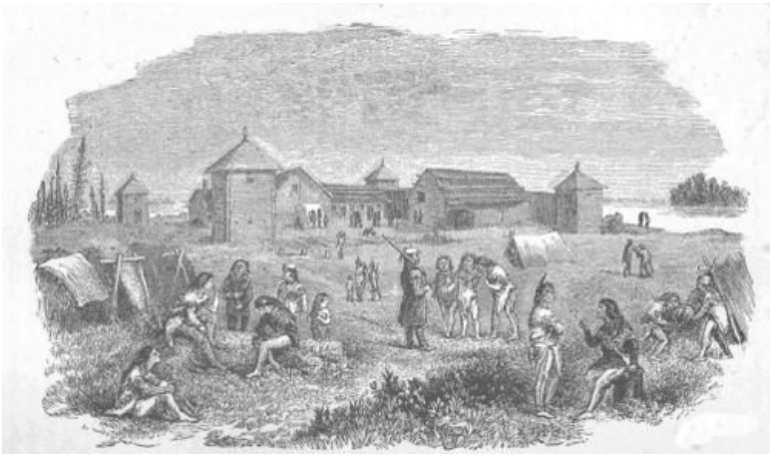
and Ann was supposed to have got aground, when the savages seeing her situation, boarded her and murdered the crew for the cargo which they knew her to contain. Yet as there were no positive proofs, only such measures were taken as would deter them from a similar attempt in future. That the lesson was not lost, was proven two years later, when the *Isabella*, from London, struck on the bar, her crew deserting her. In this instance no attempt was made to meddle with the vessel's cargo; and as the crew made their way to Vancouver, the goods were nearly all saved.

In a former voyage of the *William and Ann* to the Columbia River, she had been sent on an exploring expedition to the Gulf of Georgia to discover the mouth of Frazier's River, having on board a crew of forty men. Whenever the ship came to anchor, two sentries were kept constantly on deck to guard against any surprise or misconduct on the part of the Indians; so adroit, however, were they in the light-fingered art, that every one of the eight cannon with which the ship was armed was robbed of its ammunition, as was discovered on leaving the river! Such incidents as these served to impress the minds of the Company's officers and servants with the necessity of vigilance in their dealings with the savages.

Not all their vigilance could at all times avail to prevent mischief. When Sir George Simpson, Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, was on a visit to Vancouver in 1829, he was made aware of this truism. The Governor was on his return to Canada by way of the Red River Settlement, and had reached the Dalles of the Columbia with his party. In making the portage at this place, all the party except Dr. Tod gave their guns into the charge of two men to prevent their being stolen by the Indians, who crowded about, and whose well-known bad character made great care needful. All went well, no attempt to seize either guns or other property being made until at the end of the portage the boats had been reloaded. As the party were about to re-embark, a simultaneous rush was made by the Indians who had dogged their steps, to get possession of the boats. Dr. Tod raised his gun immediately, aiming at the head chief, who, not liking the prospect of so speedy dissolution, ordered his followers to desist, and the party were suffered to escape. It was soon after discovered that every gun belonging to the party in the boat had been wet, excepting the one carried by Dr. Tod; and to the fact that the Doctor did carry his gun, all the others owed their lives.

The great desire of the Indians for guns and ammunition led to many stratagems which were dangerous to the possessors of the coveted articles. Much more dangerous would it have been to have allowed them a free supply of these things; nor could an Indian purchase from the Company more than a stated supply, which was to be used, not for the purposes of war, but to keep himself in game.



A STATION OF THE HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY.

Dr. McLaughlin was himself once quite near falling into a trap of the Indians, so cunningly laid as to puzzle even him. This was a report brought to him by a deputation of Columbia River Indians, stating the startling fact that the fort at Nesqually had been attacked, and every inmate slaughtered. To this horrible story, told with every appearance of truth, the Doctor listened with incredulity mingled with apprehension. The Indians were closely questioned and cross-questioned, but did not conflict in their testimony. The matter assumed a very painful aspect. Not to be deceived, the Doctor had the unwelcome messengers committed to custody while he could bring other witnesses from their tribe. But they were prepared for this, and the whole tribe were as positive as those who brought the tale. Confounded by this cloud of witnesses, Dr. McLaughlin had almost determined upon sending an armed force to Nesqually to inquire into the matter, and if necessary, punish the Indians, when a detachment of men arrived from that post, and the plot was exposed! The design of the Indians had been simply to cause a division of the force at Vancouver, after which they believed they might succeed in capturing and plundering the fort. Had they truly been successful in this undertaking, every other trading-post in the

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country would have been destroyed. But so long as the head-quarters of the Company remained secure and powerful, the other stations were comparatively safe.

An incident which has been several times related, occurred at fort Walla-Walla, and shows how narrow escapes the interior traders sometimes made. The hero of this anecdote was Mr. McKinlay, one of the most estimable of the Hudson's Bay Company's officers, in charge of the fort just named. An Indian was one day lounging about the fort, and seeing some timbers lying in a heap that had been squared for pack saddles, helped himself to one and commenced cutting it down into a whip handle for his own use. To this procedure Mr. McKinlay's clerk demurred, first telling the Indian its use, and then ordering him to resign the piece of timber. The Indian insolently replied that the timber was his, and he should take it. At this the clerk, with more temper than prudence, struck the offender, knocking him over, soon after which the savage left the fort with sullen looks boding vengeance. The next day Mr. McKinlay, not being informed of what had taken place, was in a room of the fort with his clerk when a considerable party of Indians began dropping quietly in until there were fifteen or twenty of them inside the building. The first intimation of anything wrong McKinlay received was when he observed the clerk pointed out in a particular manner by one of the party. He instantly comprehended the purpose of his visitors, and with that quickness of thought which is habitual to the student of savage nature, he rushed into the store room and returned with a powder keg, flint and steel. By this time the unlucky clerk was struggling for his life with his vindictive foes. Putting down the powder in their midst and knocking out the head of the keg with a blow, McKinlay stood over it ready to strike fire with his flint and steel. The savages paused aghast. They knew the nature of the "perilous stuff," and also understood the trader's purpose. "Come," said he with a clear, determined voice, "you are twenty braves against us two: now touch him if you dare, and see who dies first." In a moment the fort was cleared, and McKinlay was left to inquire the cause of what had so nearly been a tragedy. It is hardly a subject of doubt whether or not his clerk got a scolding. Soon after, such was the powerful influence exerted by these gentlemen, the chief of the tribe flogged the pilfering Indian for the offence, and McKinlay became a great brave, a "big heart" for his courage. [Pg 32]

It was indeed necessary to have courage, patience, and prudence in dealing with the Indians. These the Hudson's Bay officers generally possessed. Perhaps the most irascible of them all in the Columbia District, was their chief, Dr. McLaughlin; but such was his goodness and justice that even the savages recognized it, and he was *hyas tyee*, or great chief, in all respects to them. Being on one occasion very much annoyed by the pertinacity of an Indian who was continually demanding pay for some stones with which the Doctor was having a vessel ballasted, he seized one of some size, and thrusting it in the Indian's mouth, cried out in a furious manner, "pay, pay! if the stones are yours, take them and eat them, you rascal! Pay, pay! the devil! the devil!" upon which explosion of wrath, the native owner of the soil thought it prudent to withdraw his immediate claims.

There was more, however, in the Doctor's action than mere indulgence of wrath. He understood perfectly that the savage values only what he can eat and wear, and that as he could not put the stones to either of these uses, his demand for pay was an impudent one.

Enough has been said to give the reader an insight into Indian character, to prepare his mind for events which are to follow, to convey an idea of the influence of the Hudson's Bay Company, and to show on what it was founded. The American Fur Companies will now be sketched, and their mode of dealing with the Indians contrasted with that of the British Company. The comparison will not be favorable; but should any unfairness be suspected, a reference to Mr. Irving's *Bonneville*, will show that the worthy Captain was forced to witness against his own countrymen in his narrative of his hunting and trading adventures in the Rocky Mountains.

The dissolution of the Pacific Fur Company, the refusal of the United States Government to protect Mr. Astor in a second attempt to carry on a commerce with the Indians west of the Rocky Mountains, and the occupation of that country by British traders, had the effect to deter individual enterprise from again attempting to establish commerce on the Pacific coast. The people waited for the Government to take some steps toward the encouragement of a trans-continental trade; the Government beholding the lion (British) in the way, waited for the expiration of the convention of 1818, in the Micawber-like hope that something would "turn up" to settle the question of territorial sovereignty. The war of 1812 had been begun on the part of Great Britain, to secure the great western territories to herself for the profits of the fur trade, almost solely. Failing in this, she had been compelled, by the treaty of Ghent, to restore to the United States all the places and forts captured during that war. Yet the forts and trading posts in the west remained practically in the possession of Great Britain; for her traders and fur companies still roamed the country, excluding American trade, and inciting (so the frontiers-men believed), the

Indians to acts of blood and horror.

Congress being importuned by the people of the West, finally, in 1815, passed an act expelling British traders from American territory east of the Rocky Mountains. Following the passage of this act the hunters and trappers of the old North American [Pg 33] Company, at the head of which Mr. Astor still remained, began to range the country about the head waters of the Mississippi and the upper Missouri. Also a few American traders had ventured into the northern provinces of Mexico, previous to the overthrow of the Spanish Government; and after that event, a thriving trade grew up between St. Louis and Santa Fé.

At length, in 1823, Mr. W.H. Ashley, of St. Louis, a merchant for a long time engaged in the fur trade on the Missouri and its tributaries, determined to push a trading party up to or beyond the Rocky Mountains. Following up the Platte River, Mr. Ashley proceeded at the head of a large party with horses and merchandise, as far as the northern branch of the Platte, called the Sweetwater. This he explored to its source, situated in that remarkable depression in the Rocky Mountains, known as the South Pass—the same which Fremont *discovered* twenty years later, during which twenty years it was annually traveled by trading parties, and just prior to Fremont's discovery, by missionaries and emigrants destined to Oregon. To Mr. Ashley also belongs the credit of having first explored the head-waters of the Colorado, called the Green River, afterwards a favorite rendezvous of the American Fur Companies. The country about the South Pass proved to be an entirely new hunting ground, and very rich in furs, as here many rivers take their rise, whose head-waters furnished abundant beaver. Here Mr. Ashley spent the summer, returning to St. Louis in the fall with a valuable collection of skins.

In 1824, Mr. Ashley repeated the expedition, extending it this time beyond Green River as far as Great Salt Lake, near which to the south he discovered another smaller lake, which he named Lake Ashley, after himself. On the shores of this lake he built a fort for trading with the Indians, and leaving in it about one hundred men, returned to St. Louis the second time with a large amount of furs. During the time the fort was occupied by Mr. Ashley's men, a period of three years, more than one hundred and eighty thousand dollars worth of furs were collected and sent to St. Louis. In 1827, the fort, and all Mr. Ashley's interest in the business, was sold to the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, at the head of which were Jedediah Smith, William Sublette, and David Jackson, Sublette being the leading spirit in the Company.

The custom of these enterprising traders, who had been in the mountains since 1824, was to divide their force, each taking his command to a good hunting ground, and returning at stated times to rendezvous, generally appointed on the head-waters of Green River. Frequently the other fur companies, (for there were other companies formed on the heels of Ashley's enterprise,) learning of the place appointed for the yearly rendezvous, brought their goods to the same resort, when an intense rivalry was exhibited by the several traders as to which company should soonest dispose of its goods, getting, of course, the largest amount of furs from the trappers and Indians. So great was the competition in the years between 1826 and 1829, when there were about six hundred American trappers in and about the Rocky Mountains, besides those of the Hudson's Bay Company, that it was death for a man of one company to dispose of his furs to a rival association. Even a "free trapper"—that is, one not indentured, but hunting upon certain terms of agreement concerning the [Pg 34] price of his furs and the cost of his outfit, only, dared not sell to any other company than the one he had agreed with.

Jedediah Smith, of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, during their first year in the mountains, took a party of five trappers into Oregon, being the first American, trader or other, to cross into that country since the breaking up of Mr. Astor's establishment. He trapped on the head-waters of the Snake River until autumn, when he fell in with a party of Hudson's Bay trappers, and going with them to their post in the Flathead country, wintered there.

Again, in 1826, Smith, Sublette, and Jackson, brought out a large number of men to trap in the Snake River country, and entered into direct competition with the Hudson's Bay Company, whom they opposed with hardly a degree more of zeal than they competed with rival American traders: this one extra degree being inspired by a "spirit of '76" toward anything British.

After the Rocky Mountain Fur Company had extended its business by the purchase of Mr. Ashley's interest, the partners determined to push their enterprise to the Pacific coast, regardless of the opposition they were likely to encounter from the Hudson's Bay traders. Accordingly, in the spring of 1827, the Company was divided up into three parts, to be led separately, by different routes, into the Indian Territory, nearer the ocean.

Smith's route was from the Platte River, southwards to Santa Fé, thence to the bay of San Francisco, and thence along the coast to the Columbia River. His party were successful, and had arrived in the autumn of the following year at the Umpqua River, about two hundred miles south of the Columbia, in safety. Here one of those sudden

reverses to which the "mountain-man" is liable at any moment, overtook him. His party at this time consisted of thirteen men, with their horses, and a collection of furs valued at twenty thousand dollars. Arrived at the Umpqua, they encamped for the night on its southern bank, unaware that the natives in this vicinity (the Shastas) were more fierce and treacherous than the indolent tribes of California, for whom, probably, they had a great contempt. All went well until the following morning, the Indians hanging about the camp, but apparently friendly. Smith had just breakfasted, and was occupied in looking for a fording-place for the animals, being on a raft, and having with him a little Englishman and one Indian. When they were in the middle of the river the Indian snatched Smith's gun and jumped into the water. At the same instant a yell from the camp, which was in sight, proclaimed that it was attacked. Quick as thought Smith snatched the Englishman's gun, and shot dead the Indian in the river.

To return to the camp was certain death. Already several of his men had fallen; overpowered by numbers he could not hope that any would escape, and nothing was left him but flight. He succeeded in getting to the opposite shore with his raft before he could be intercepted, and fled with his companion, on foot and with only one gun, and no provisions, to the mountains that border the river. With great good fortune they were enabled to pass through the remaining two hundred miles of their journey without accident, though not without suffering, and reach Fort Vancouver in a destitute condition, where they were kindly cared for. [Pg 35]

Of the men left in camp, only two escaped. One man named Black defended himself until he saw an opportunity for flight, when he escaped to the cover of the woods, and finally to a friendly tribe farther north, near the coast, who piloted him to Vancouver. The remaining man was one Turner, of a very powerful frame, who was doing camp duty as cook on this eventful morning. When the Indians rushed upon him he defended himself with a huge firebrand, or half-burnt poplar stick, with which he laid about him like Sampson, killing four red-skins before he saw a chance of escape. Singularly, for one in his extremity, he did escape, and also arrived at Vancouver that winter.

Dr. McLaughlin received the unlucky trader and his three surviving men with every mark and expression of kindness, and entertained them through the winter. Not only this, but he dispatched a strong, armed party to the scene of the disaster to punish the Indians and recover the stolen goods; all of which was done at his own expense, both as an act of friendship toward his American rivals, and as necessary to the discipline which they everywhere maintained among the Indians. Should this offence go unpunished, the next attack might be upon one of his own parties going annually down into California. Sir George Simpson, the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, chanced to be spending the winter at Vancouver. He offered to send Smith to London the following summer, in the Company's vessel, where he might dispose of his furs to advantage; but Smith declined this offer, and finally sold his furs to Dr. McLaughlin, and returned in the spring to the Rocky Mountains.

On Sublette's return from St. Louis, in the summer of 1829, with men and merchandise for the year's trade, he became uneasy on account of Smith's protracted absence. According to a previous plan, he took a large party into the Snake River country to hunt. Among the recruits from St. Louis was Joseph L. Meek, the subject of the narrative following this chapter. Sublette not meeting with Smith's party on its way from the Columbia, as he still hoped, at length detailed a party to look for him on the head-waters of the Snake. Meek was one of the men sent to look for the missing partner, whom he discovered at length in Pierre's Hole, a deep valley in the mountains, from which issues the Snake River in many living streams. Smith returned with the men to camp, where the tale of his disasters was received after the manner of mountain-men, simply declaring with a momentarily sobered countenance, that their comrade has not been "in luck;" with which brief and equivocal expression of sympathy the subject is dismissed. To dwell on the dangers incident to their calling would be to half disarm themselves of their necessary courage; and it is only when they are gathered about the fire in their winter camp, that they indulge in tales of wild adventure and "hair-breadth 'scapes," or make sorrowful reference to a comrade lost.

Influenced by the hospitable treatment which Smith had received at the hands of the Hudson's Bay Company, the partners now determined to withdraw from competition with them in the Snake country, and to trap upon the waters of the Colorado, in the neighborhood of their fort. But "luck," the mountain-man's Providence, seemed to have deserted Smith. In crossing the Colorado River with a considerable collection of skins, he was again attacked by Indians, and only escaped by losing all his property. [Pg 36] He then went to St. Louis for a supply of merchandise, and fitted out a trading party for Santa Fé; but on his way to that place was killed in an encounter with the savages.

Turner, the man who so valiantly wielded the firebrand on the Umpqua River, several years later met with a similar adventure on the Rogue River, in Southern Oregon, and was the means of saving the lives of his party by his courage, strength, and

alertness. He finally, when trapping had become unprofitable, retired upon a farm in the Wallamet Valley, as did many other mountain-men who survived the dangers of their perilous trade.

After the death of Smith, the Rocky Mountain Fur Company continued its operations under the command of Bridger, Fitzpatrick, and Milton Sublette, brother of William. In the spring of 1830 they received about two hundred recruits, and with little variation kept up their number of three or four hundred men for a period of eight or ten years longer, or until the beaver were hunted out of every nook and corner of the Rocky Mountains.

Previous to 1835, there were in and about the Rocky Mountains, beside the "American" and "Rocky Mountain" companies, the St. Louis Company, and eight or ten "lone traders." Among these latter were William Sublette, Robert Campbell, J.O. Pattie, Mr. Pilcher, Col. Charles Bent, St. Vrain, William Bent, Mr. Gant, and Mr. Blackwell. All these companies and traders more or less frequently penetrated into the countries of New Mexico, Old Mexico, Sonora, and California; returning sometimes through the mountain regions of the latter State, by the Humboldt River to the head-waters of the Colorado. Seldom, in all their journeys, did they intrude on that portion of the Indian Territory lying within three hundred miles of Fort Vancouver, or which forms the area of the present State of Oregon.

Up to 1832, the fur trade in the West had been chiefly conducted by merchants from the frontier cities, especially by those of St. Louis. The old "North American" was the only exception. But in the spring of this year, Captain Bonneville, an United States officer on furlough, led a company of a hundred men, with a train of wagons, horses and mules, with merchandise, into the trapping grounds of the Rocky Mountains. His wagons were the first that had ever crossed the summit of these mountains, though William Sublette had, two or three years previous, brought wagons as far as the valley of the Wind River, on the east side of the range. Captain Bonneville remained nearly three years in the hunting and trapping grounds, taking parties of men into the Colorado, Humboldt, and Sacramento valleys; but he realized no profits from his expedition, being opposed and competed with by both British and American traders of larger experience.

But Captain Bonneville's venture was a fortunate one compared with that of Mr. Nathaniel Wyeth of Massachusetts, who also crossed the continent in 1832, with the view of establishing a trade on the Columbia River. Mr. Wyeth brought with him a small party of men, all inexperienced in frontier or mountain life, and destined for a salmon fishery on the Columbia. He had reached Independence, Missouri, the last station before plunging into the wilderness, and found himself somewhat at a loss how to proceed, until, at this juncture, he was overtaken by the party of William Sublette, from St. Louis to the Rocky Mountains, with whom he travelled in company to the rendezvous at Pierre's Hole. [Pg 37]

When Wyeth arrived at the Columbia River, after tarrying until he had acquired some mountain experiences, he found that his vessel, which was loaded with merchandise for the Columbia River trade, had not arrived. He remained at Vancouver through the winter, the guest of the Hudson's Bay Company, and either having learned or surmised that his vessel was wrecked, returned to the United States in the following year. Not discouraged, however, he made another venture in 1834, despatching the ship *May Dacre*, Captain Lambert, for the Columbia River, with another cargo of Indian goods, traveling himself overland with a party of two hundred men, and a considerable quantity of merchandise which he expected to sell to the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. In this expectation he was defeated by William Sublette, who had also brought out a large assortment of goods for the Indian trade, and had sold out, supplying the market, before Mr. Wyeth arrived.

Wyeth then built a post, named Fort Hall, on Snake River, at the junction of the Portneuf, where he stored his goods, and having detached most of his men in trapping parties, proceeded to the Columbia River to meet the *May Dacre*. He reached the Columbia about the same time with his vessel, and proceeded at once to erect a salmon fishery. To forward this purpose he built a post, called Fort William, on the lower end of Wappatoo (now known as Sauvie's) Island, near where the Lower Wallamet falls into the Columbia. But for various reasons he found the business on which he had entered unprofitable. He had much trouble with the Indians, his men were killed or drowned, so that by the time he had half a cargo of fish, he was ready to abandon the effort to establish a commerce with the Oregon Indians, and was satisfied that no enterprise less stupendous and powerful than that of the Hudson's Bay Company could be long sustained in that country.

Much complaint was subsequently made by Americans, chiefly Missionaries, of the conduct of that company in not allowing Mr. Wyeth to purchase beaver skins of the Indians, but Mr. Wyeth himself made no such complaint. Personally, he was treated with unvarying kindness, courtesy, and hospitality. As a trader, they would not permit him to undersell them. In truth, they no doubt wished him away; because competition would soon ruin the business of either, and they liked not to have the

Indians taught to expect more than their furs were worth, nor to have the Indians' confidence in themselves destroyed or tampered with.

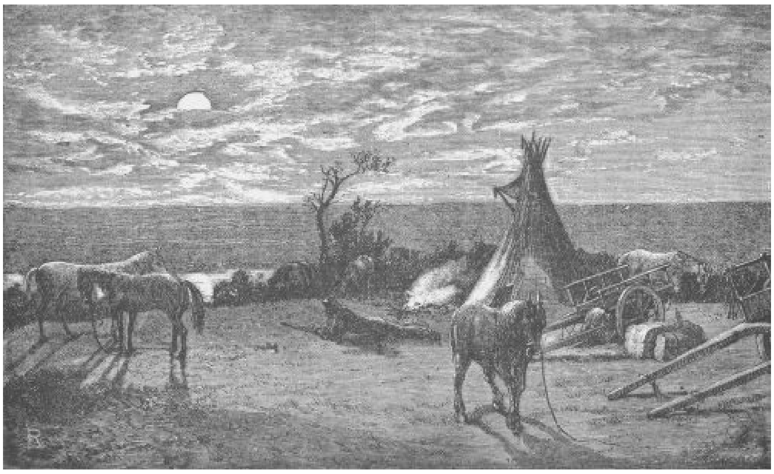
The Hudson's Bay Company were hardly so unfriendly to him as the American companies; since to the former he was enabled to sell his goods and fort on the Snake River, before he returned to the United States, which he did in 1835.

The sale of Fort Hall to the Hudson's Bay Company was a finishing blow at the American fur trade in the Rocky Mountains, which after two or three years of constantly declining profits, was entirely abandoned.

Something of the dangers incident to the life of the hunter and trapper may be gathered from the following statements, made by various parties who have been engaged in it. In 1808, a Missouri Company engaged in fur hunting on the three [Pg 38] forks of the river Missouri, were attacked by Blackfeet, losing twenty-seven men, and being compelled to abandon the country. In 1823, Mr. Ashley was attacked on the same river by the Arickaras, and had twenty-six men killed. About the same time the Missouri company lost seven men, and fifteen thousand dollars' worth of merchandise on the Yellowstone River. A few years previous, Major Henry lost, on the Missouri River, six men and fifty horses. In the sketch given of Smith's trading adventures is shown how uncertain were life and property at a later period. Of the two hundred men whom Wyeth led into the Indian country, only about forty were alive at the end of three years. There was, indeed, a constant state of warfare between the Indians and the whites, wherever the American Companies hunted, in which great numbers of both lost their lives. Add to this cause of decimation the perils from wild beasts, famine, cold, and all manner of accidents, and the trapper's chance of life was about one in three.

Of the causes which have produced the enmity of the Indians, there are about as many. It was found to be the case almost universally, that on the first visit of the whites the natives were friendly, after their natural fears had been allayed. But by degrees their cupidity was excited to possess themselves of the much coveted dress, arms, and goods of their visitors. As they had little or nothing to offer in exchange, which the white man considered an equivalent, they took the only method remaining of gratifying their desire of possession, and *stole* the coveted articles which they could not purchase. When they learned that the white men punished theft, they murdered to prevent the punishment. Often, also, they had wrongs of their own to avenge. White men did not always regard their property-rights. They were guilty of infamous conduct toward Indian women. What one party of whites told them was true, another plainly contradicted, leaving the lie between them. They were overbearing toward the Indians on their own soil, exciting to irrepressible hostility the natural jealousy of the inferior toward the superior race, where both are free, which characterizes all people. In short, the Indians were not without their grievances; and from barbarous ignorance and wrong on one side, and intelligent wrong-doing on the other, together with the misunderstandings likely to arise between two entirely distinct races, grew constantly a thousand abuses, which resulted in a deadly enmity between the two.

For several reasons this evil existed to a greater degree among the American traders and trappers than among the British. The American trapper was not, like the Hudson's Bay employees, bred to the business. Oftener than any other way he was some wild youth who, after an *escapade* in the society of his native place, sought safety from reproach or punishment in the wilderness. Or he was some disappointed man who, with feelings embittered towards his fellows, preferred the seclusion of the forest and mountain. Many were of a class disreputable everywhere, who gladly embraced a life not subject to social laws. A few were brave, independent, and hardy spirits, who delighted in the hardships and wild adventures their calling made necessary. All these men, the best with the worst, were subject to no will but their own; and all experience goes to prove that a life of perfect liberty is apt to degenerate into a life of license. Even their own lives, and those of their companions, [Pg 39] when it depended upon their own prudence, were but lightly considered. The constant presence of danger made them reckless. It is easy to conceive how, under these circumstances, the natives and the foreigners grew to hate each other, in the Indian country; especially after the Americans came to the determination to "shoot an Indian at sight," unless he belonged to some tribe with whom they had intermarried, after the manner of the trappers.



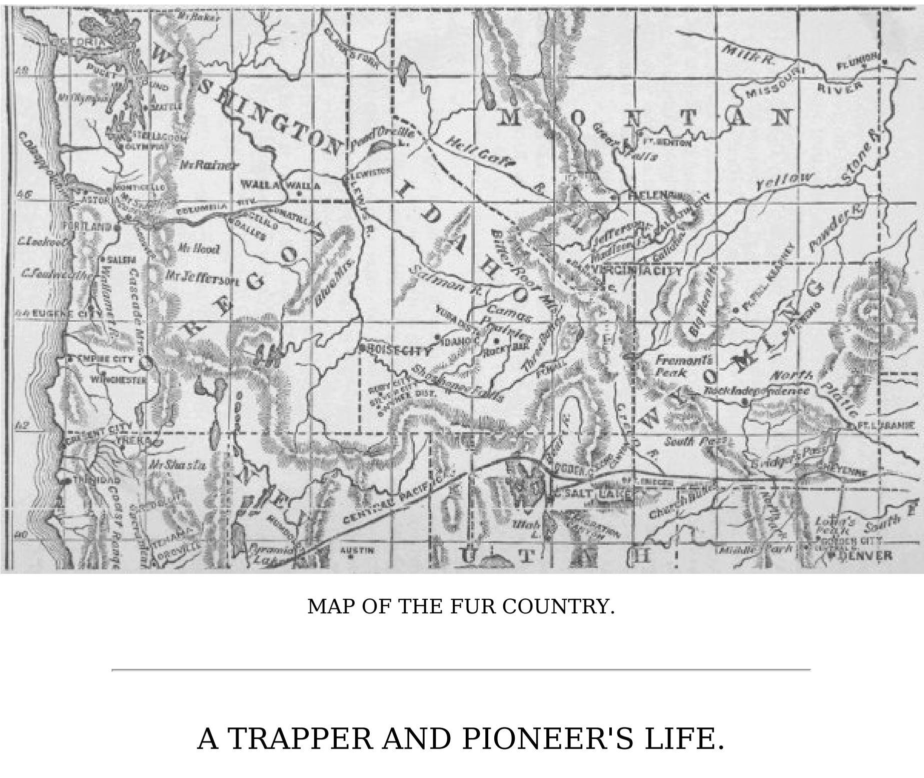
WATCHING FOR INDIAN HORSE-THIEVES.

On the other hand, the employees of the Hudson's Bay Company were many of them half-breeds or full-blooded Indians of the Iroquois nation, towards whom nearly all the tribes were kindly disposed. Even the Frenchmen who trapped for this company were well liked by the Indians on account of their suavity of manner, and the ease with which they adapted themselves to savage life. Besides most of them had native wives and half-breed children, and were regarded as relatives. They were trained to the life of a trapper, were subject to the will of the Company, and were generally just and equitable in their dealings with the Indians, according to that company's will, and the dictates of prudence. Here was a wide difference.

Notwithstanding this, there were many dangers to be encountered. The hostility of some of the tribes could never be overcome; nor has it ever abated. Such were the Crows, the Blackfeet, the Cheyennes, the Apaches, the Camanches. Only a superior force could compel the friendly offices of these tribes for any white man, and then their treachery was as dangerous as their open hostility.

It happened, therefore, that although the Hudson's Bay Company lost comparatively few men by the hands of the Indians, they sometimes found them implacable foes in common with the American trappers; and frequently one party was very glad of the others' assistance. Altogether, as has before been stated, the loss of life was immense in proportion to the number employed.

Very few of those who had spent years in the Rocky Mountains ever returned to the United States. With their Indian wives and half-breed children, they scattered themselves throughout Oregon, until when, a number of years after the abandonment of the fur trade, Congress donated large tracts of land to actual settlers, they laid claim, each to his selected portion, and became active citizens of their adopted state.



MAP OF THE FUR COUNTRY.

A TRAPPER AND PIONEER'S LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

As has been stated in the Introduction, Joseph L. Meek was a native of Washington Co., Va. Born in the early part of the present century, and brought up on a plantation where the utmost liberty was accorded to the "young massa;" preferring out-door sports with the youthful bondsmen of his father, to study with the bald-headed schoolmaster who furnished him the alphabet on a paddle; possessing an exhaustless fund of waggish humor, united to a spirit of adventure and remarkable personal strength, he unwittingly furnished in himself the very material of which the heroes of the wilderness were made. Virginia, "the mother of Presidents," has furnished many such men, who, in the early days of the now populous Western States, became the hardy frontiers-men, or the fearless Indian fighters who were the bone and sinew of the land.

When young Joe was about eighteen years of age, he wearied of the monotony of plantation life, and jumping into the wagon of a neighbor who was going to Louisville, Ky., started out in life for himself. He "reckoned they did not grieve for him at home;" at which conclusion others besides Joe naturally arrive on hearing of his heedless disposition, and utter contempt for the ordinary and useful employments to which other men apply themselves. [Pg 42]

Joe probably believed that should his father grieve for him, his step-mother would be able to console him; this step-mother, though a pious and good woman, not being one of the lad's favorites, as might easily be conjectured. It was such thoughts as these that kept up his resolution to seek the far west. In the autumn of 1828 he arrived in St. Louis, and the following spring he fell in with Mr. Wm. Sublette, of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, who was making his annual visit to that frontier town to purchase merchandise for the Indian country, and pick up recruits for the fur-hunting service. To this experienced leader he offered himself.

THE ENLISTMENT.

"How old are you?" asked Sublette.

"A little past eighteen."

"And you want to go to the Rocky Mountains?"

"Yes." [Pg 43]

"You don't know what you are talking about, boy. You'll be killed before you get half way there."

"If I do, I reckon I can die!" said Joe, with a flash of his fall dark eyes, and throwing back his shoulders to show their breadth.

"Come," exclaimed the trader, eyeing the youthful candidate with admiration, and perhaps a touch of pity also; "that is the game spirit. I think you'll do, after all. Only be prudent, and keep your wits about you."

"Where else should they be?" laughed Joe, as he marched off, feeling an inch or two taller than before.

Then commenced the business of preparing for the journey—making acquaintance with the other recruits—enjoying the novelty of owning an outfit, being initiated into the mysteries of camp duty by the few old hunters who were to accompany the expedition, and learning something of their swagger and disregard of civilized observances.

On the 17th of March, 1829, the company, numbering about sixty men, left St. Louis, and proceeded on horses and mules, with pack-horses for the goods, up through the

state of Missouri. Camp-life commenced at the start; and this being the season of the year when the weather is most disagreeable, its romance rapidly melted away with the snow and sleet which varied the sharp spring wind and the frequent cold rains. The recruits went through all the little mishaps incident to the business and to their inexperience, such as involuntary somersaults over the heads of their mules, bloody noses, bruises, dusty faces, bad colds, accidents in fording streams,—yet withal no very serious hurts or hindrances. Rough weather and severe exercise gave them wolfish appetites, which sweetened the coarse camp-fare and amateur cooking.

[Pg 44]

Getting up at four o'clock of a March morning to kindle fires and attend to the animals was not the most delectable duty that our labor-despising young recruit could have chosen; but if he repented of the venture he had made nobody was the wiser. Sleeping of stormy nights in corn-cribs or under sheds, could not be by any stretch of imagination converted into a highly romantic or heroic mode of lodging one's self. The squalid manner of living of the few inhabitants of Missouri at this period, gave a forlorn aspect to the country which is lacking in the wilderness itself; —a thought which sometimes occurred to Joe like a hope for the future. Mountain-fare he began to think must be better than the boiled corn and pork of the Missourians. Antelope and buffalo meat were more suitable viands for a hunter than coon and opossum. Thus those very duties which seemed undignified, and those hardships without danger or glory, which marked the beginning of his career made him ambitious of a more free and hazardous life on the plains and in the mountains.

Among the recruits was a young man not far from Joe's own age, named Robert Newell, from Ohio. One morning, when the company was encamped near Boonville, the two young men were out looking for their mules, when they encountered an elderly woman returning from the milking yard with a gourd of milk. Newell made some remark on the style of vessel she carried, when she broke out in a sharp voice, —

"Young chap, I'll bet you run off from your mother! Who'll mend them holes in the elbow of your coat? You're a purty looking chap to go to the mountains, among them Injuns! They'll *kill* you. You'd better go back home!"

[Pg 45]

Considering that these frontier people knew what Indian fighting was, this was no doubt sound and disinterested advice, notwithstanding it was given somewhat sharply. And so the young men felt it to be; but it was not in the nature of either of them to turn back from a course because there was danger in it. The thought of home, and somebody to mend their coats, was, however, for the time strongly presented. But the company moved on, with undiminished numbers, stared at by the few inhabitants, and having their own little adventures, until they came to Independence, the last station before committing themselves to the wilderness.

At this place, which contained a dwelling-house, cotton-gin, and grocery, the camp tarried for a few days to adjust the packs, and prepare for a final start across the plains. On Sunday the settlers got together for a shooting-match, in which some of the travelers joined, without winning many laurels. Coon-skins, deer-skins, and bees-wax changed hands freely among the settlers, whose skill with the rifle was greater than their hoard of silver dollars. This was the last vestige of civilization which the company could hope to behold for years; and rude as it was, yet won from them many a parting look as they finally took their way across the plains toward the Arkansas River.

Often on this part of the march a dead silence fell upon the party, which remained unbroken for miles of the way. Many no doubt were regretting homes by them abandoned, or wondering dreamily how many and whom of that company would ever see the Missouri country again. Many indeed went the way the woman of the gourd had prophesied; but not the hero of this story, nor his comrade Newell.

[Pg 46]

The route of Captain Sublette led across the country from near the mouth of the Kansas River to the River Arkansas; thence to the South Fork of the Platte; thence on to the North Fork of that River, to where Ft. Laramie now stands; thence up the North Fork to the Sweetwater, and thence across in a still northwesterly direction to the head of Wind River.

The manner of camp-travel is now so well known through the writings of Irving, and still more from the great numbers which have crossed the plains since *Astoria* and *Bonneville* were written, that it would be superfluous here to enter upon a particular description of a train on that journey. A strict half-military discipline had to be maintained, regular duties assigned to each person, precautions taken against the loss of animals either by straying or Indian stampeding, etc. Some of the men were appointed as camp-keepers, who had all these things to look after, besides standing guard. A few were selected as hunters, and these were free to come and go, as their calling required. None but the most experienced were chosen for hunters, on a march; therefore our recruit could not aspire to that dignity yet.

The first adventure the company met with worthy of mention after leaving Independence, was in crossing the country between the Arkansas and the Platte.

Here the camp was surprised one morning by a band of Indians a thousand strong, that came sweeping down upon them in such warlike style that even Captain Sublette was fain to believe it his last battle. Upon the open prairie there is no such thing as flight, nor any cover under which to conceal a party even for a few moments. It is always fight or die, if the assailants are in the humor for war.

Happily on this occasion the band proved to be more peaceably disposed than their appearance indicated, being the warriors of several tribes—the Sioux, Arapahoes, Kiowas, and Cheyennes, who had been holding a council to consider probably what mischief they could do to some other tribes. The spectacle they presented as they [Pg 47] came at full speed on horseback, armed, painted, brandishing their weapons, and yelling in first-rate Indian style, was one which might well strike with a palsy the stoutest heart and arm. What were a band of sixty men against a thousand armed warriors in full fighting trim, with spears, shields, bows, battle-axes, and not a few guns?

But it is the rule of the mountain-men to *fight*—and that there is a chance for life until the breath is out of the body; therefore Captain Sublette had his little force drawn up in line of battle. On came the savages, whooping and swinging their weapons above their heads. Sublette turned to his men. "When you hear my shot, then fire." Still they came on, until within about fifty paces of the line of waiting men. Sublette turned his head, and saw his command with their guns all up to their faces ready to fire, then raised his own gun. Just at this moment the principal chief sprang off his horse and laid his weapon on the ground, making signs of peace. Then followed a talk, and after the giving of a considerable present, Sublette was allowed to depart. This he did with all dispatch, the company putting as much distance as possible between themselves and their visitors before making their next camp. Considering the warlike character of these tribes and their superior numbers, it was as narrow an escape on the part of the company as it was an exceptional freak of generosity on the part of the savages to allow it. But Indians have all a great respect for a man who shows no fear; and it was most probably the warlike movement of Captain Sublette and his party which inspired a willingness on the part of the chief to accept a present, when he had the power to have taken the whole train. Besides, according to Indian logic, the present cost him nothing, and it might cost him many warriors to capture the train. Had there been the least wavering on Sublette's part, [Pg 48] or fear in the countenances of his men, the end of the affair would have been different. This adventure was a grand initiation of the raw recruits, giving them both an insight into savage modes of attack, and an opportunity to test their own nerve.

The company proceeded without accident, and arrived, about the first of July, at the rendezvous, which was appointed for this year on the Popo Agie, one of the streams which form the head-waters of Bighorn River.

Now, indeed, young Joe had an opportunity of seeing something of the life upon which he had entered. As customary, when the traveling partner arrived at rendezvous with the year's merchandise, there was a meeting of all the partners, if they were within reach of the appointed place. On this occasion Smith was absent on his tour through California and Western Oregon, as has been related in the prefatory chapter. Jackson, the resident partner, and commander for the previous year, was not yet in; and Sublette had just arrived with the goods from St. Louis.

All the different hunting and trapping parties and Indian allies were gathered together, so that the camp contained several hundred men, with their riding and pack-horses. Nor were Indian women and children wanting to give variety and an appearance of domesticity to the scene.

THE SUMMER RENDEZVOUS.

The Summer rendezvous was always chosen in some valley where there was grass for the animals, and game for the camp. The plains along the Popo Agie, besides

furnishing these necessary bounties, were bordered by picturesque mountain ranges, whose naked bluffs of red sandstone glowed in the morning and evening sun with a mellowness of coloring charming to the eye of the Virginia recruit. The waving grass [Pg 49] of the plain, variegated with wild flowers; the clear summer heavens flecked with white clouds that threw soft shadows in passing; the grazing animals scattered about the meadows; the lodges of the *Booshways*,[A] around which clustered the camp in motley garb and brilliant coloring; gay laughter, and the murmur of soft Indian voices, all made up a most spirited and enchanting picture, in which the eye of an artist could not fail to delight.

But as the goods were opened the scene grew livelier. All were eager to purchase, most of the trappers to the full amount of their year's wages; and some of them, generally free trappers, went in debt to the company to a very considerable amount, after spending the value of a year's labor, privation, and danger, at the rate of several hundred dollars in a single day.

The difference between a hired and a free trapper was greatly in favor of the latter. The hired trapper was regularly indentured, and bound not only to hunt and trap for his employers, but also to perform any duty required of him in camp. The Booshway, or the trader, or the partisan, (leader of the detachment,) had him under his command, to make him take charge of, load and unload the horses, stand guard, cook, hunt fuel, or, in short, do any and every duty. In return for this toilsome service he received an outfit of traps, arms and ammunition, horses, and whatever his service required. Besides his outfit, he received no more than three or four hundred dollars a year as wages.

There was also a class of free trappers, who were furnished with their outfit by the company they trapped for, and who were obliged to agree to a certain stipulated [Pg 50] price for their furs before the hunt commenced. But the genuine free trapper regarded himself as greatly the superior of either of the foregoing classes. He had his own horses and accoutrements, arms and ammunition. He took what route he thought fit, hunted and trapped when and where he chose; traded with the Indians; sold his furs to whoever offered highest for them; dressed flauntingly, and generally had an Indian wife and half-breed children. They prided themselves on their hardihood and courage; even on their recklessness and profligacy. Each claimed to own the best horse; to have had the wildest adventures; to have made the most narrow escapes; to have killed the greatest number of bears and Indians; to be the greatest favorite with the Indian belles, the greatest consumer of alcohol, and to have the most money to spend, *i. e.* the largest credit on the books of the company. If his hearers did not believe him, he was ready to run a race with him, to beat him at "old sledge," or to fight, if fighting was preferred,—ready to prove what he affirmed in any manner the company pleased.

If the free trapper had a wife, she moved with the camp to which he attached himself, being furnished with a fine horse, caparisoned in the gayest and costliest manner. Her dress was of the finest goods the market afforded, and was suitably ornamented with beads, ribbons, fringes, and feathers. Her rank, too, as a free trapper's wife, gave her consequence not only in her own eyes, but in those of her tribe, and protected her from that slavish drudgery to which as the wife of an Indian hunter or warrior she would have been subject. The only authority which the free trapper acknowledged was that of his Indian spouse, who generally ruled in the lodge, however her lord blustered outside.

One of the free trapper's special delights was to take in hand the raw recruits, to [Pg 51] gorge their wonder with his boastful tales, and to amuse himself with shocking his pupil's civilized notions of propriety. Joe Meek did not escape this sort of "breaking in;" and if it should appear in the course of this narrative that he proved an apt scholar, it will but illustrate a truth—that high spirits and fine talents tempt the tempter to win them over to his ranks. But Joe was not won over all at once. He beheld the beautiful spectacle of the encampment as it has been described, giving life and enchantment to the summer landscape, changed into a scene of the wildest carousal, going from bad to worse, until from harmless noise and bluster it came to fighting and loss of life. At this first rendezvous he was shocked to behold the revolting exhibition of four trappers playing at a game of cards with the dead body of a comrade for a card-table! Such was the indifference to all the natural and ordinary emotions which these veterans of the wilderness cultivated in themselves, and inculcated in those who came under their influence. Scenes like this at first had the effect to bring feelings of home-sickness, while it inspired by contrast a sort of penitential and religious feeling also. According to Meek's account of those early days in the mountains, he said some secret prayers, and shed some secret tears. But this did not last long. The force of example, and especially the force of ridicule, is very potent with the young; nor are we quite free from their influence later in life.

If the gambling, swearing, drinking, and fighting at first astonished and alarmed the unsophisticated Joe, he found at the same time something to admire, and that he felt to be congenial with his own disposition, in the fearlessness, the contempt of sordid gain, the hearty merriment and frolicsome abandon of the better portion of the men [Pg 52]

about him. A spirit of emulation arose in him to become as brave as the bravest, as hardy as the hardiest, and as gay as the gayest, even while his feelings still revolted at many things which his heroic models were openly guilty of. If at any time in the future course of this narrative, Joe is discovered to have taken leave of his early scruples, the reader will considerately remember the associations by which he was surrounded for years, until the memory of the pious teachings of his childhood was nearly, if not quite, obliterated. To "nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice," should be the frame of mind in which both the writer and reader of Joe's adventures should strive to maintain himself.

Before our hero is ushered upon the active scenes of a trapper's life, it may be well to present to the reader a sort of *guide to camp life*, in order that he may be able to understand some of its technicalities, as they may be casually mentioned hereafter.

When the large camp is on the march, it has a leader, generally one of the Booshways, who rides in advance, or at the head of the column. Near him is a led mule, chosen for its qualities of speed and trustworthiness, on which are packed two small trunks that balance each other like panniers, and which contain the company's books, papers, and articles of agreement with the men. Then follow the pack animals, each one bearing three packs—one on each side, and one on top—so nicely adjusted as not to slip in traveling. These are in charge of certain men called camp-keepers, who have each three of these to look after. The trappers and hunters have two horses, or mules, one to ride, and one to pack their traps. If there are women and children in the train, all are mounted. Where the country is safe, the caravan moves in single file, often stretching out for half or three-quarters of a mile. At the end of [Pg 53] the column rides the second man, or "little Booshway," as the men call him; usually a hired officer, whose business it is to look after the order and condition of the whole camp.

MULE PACKING.

On arriving at a suitable spot to make the night camp, the leader stops, dismounts in the particular space which is to be devoted to himself in its midst. The others, as they come up, form a circle; the "second man" bringing up the rear, to be sure all are there. He then proceeds to appoint every man a place in the circle, and to examine the horses' backs to see if any are sore. The horses are then turned out, under a guard, to graze; but before darkness comes on are placed inside the ring, and picketed by a stake driven in the earth, or with two feet so tied together as to prevent easy or free locomotion. The men are divided into messes: so many trappers and so many camp-keepers to a mess. The business of eating is not a very elaborate one, where the sole article of diet is meat, either dried or roasted. By a certain hour all is quiet in camp, and only the guard is awake. At times during the night, the leader, or the officer of the guard, gives the guard a challenge—"all's well!" which is answered by "all's well!"

In the morning at daylight, or sometimes not till sunrise, according to the safe or dangerous locality, the second man comes forth from his lodge and cries in French, "*leve, leve, leve, leve, leve!*" fifteen or twenty times, which is the command to rise. In about five minutes more he cries out again, in French, "*leche lego, leche lego!*" or turn out, turn out; at which command all come out from the lodges, and the horses are turned loose to feed; but not before a horseman has galloped all round the camp at some distance, and discovered every thing to be safe in the neighborhood. Again, when the horses have been sufficiently fed, under the eye of a guard, they are driven [Pg 54] up, the packs replaced, the train mounted, and once more it moves off, in the order before mentioned.

In a settled camp, as in winter, there are other regulations. The leader and the

second man occupy the same relative positions; but other minor regulations are observed. The duty of a trapper, for instance, in the trapping season, is only to trap, and take care of his own horses. When he comes in at night, he takes his beaver to the clerk, and the number is counted off, and placed to his credit. Not he, but the camp-keepers, take off the skins and dry them. In the winter camp there are six persons to a lodge: four trappers and two camp-keepers; therefore the trappers are well waited upon, their only duty being to hunt, in turns, for the camp. When a piece of game is brought in,—a deer, an antelope, or buffalo meat,—it is thrown down on the heap which accumulates in front of the Booshway's lodge; and the second man stands by and cuts it up, or has it cut up for him. The first man who chances to come along, is ordered to stand still and turn his back to the pile of game, while the "little Booshway" lays hold of a piece that has been cut off, and asks in a loud voice—"who will have this?"—and the man answering for him, says, "the Booshway," or perhaps "number six," or "number twenty"—meaning certain messes; and the number is called to come and take their meat. In this blind way the meat is portioned off; strongly reminding one of the game of "button, button, who has the button?" In this chance game of the meat, the Booshway fares no better than his men; unless, in rare instances, the little Booshway should indicate to the man who calls off, that a certain choice piece is designed for the mess of the leader or the second man.

A gun is never allowed to be fired in camp under any provocation, short of an Indian raid; but the guns are frequently inspected, to see if they are in order; and woe to the careless camp-keeper who neglects this or any other duty. When the second man comes around, and finds a piece of work imperfectly done, whether it be cleaning the firearms, making a hair rope, or a skin lodge, or washing a horse's back, he does not threaten the offender with personal chastisement, but calls up another man and asks him, "Can *you* do this properly?" [Pg 55]

"Yes, sir."

"I will give you ten dollars to do it;" and the ten dollars is set down to the account of the inefficient camp-keeper. But he does not risk forfeiting another ten dollars in the same manner.

In the spring, when the camp breaks up, the skins which have been used all winter for lodges are cut up to make moccasins: because from their having been thoroughly smoked by the lodge fires they do not shrink in wetting, like raw skins. This is an important quality in a moccasin, as a trapper is almost constantly in the water, and should not his moccasins be smoked they will close upon his feet, in drying, like a vice. Sometimes after trapping all day, the tired and soaked trapper lies down in his blankets at night, still wet. But by-and-by he is wakened by the pinching of his moccasins, and is obliged to rise and seek the water again to relieve himself of the pain. For the same reason, when spring comes, the trapper is forced to cut off the lower half of his buckskin breeches, and piece them down with blanket leggins, which he wears all through the trapping season.

Such were a few of the peculiarities, and the hardships also, of a life in the Rocky Mountains. If the camp discipline, and the dangers and hardships to which a raw recruit was exposed, failed to harden him to the service in one year, he was rejected as a "trifling fellow," and sent back to the settlement the next year. It was not probable, therefore, that the mountain-man often was detected in complaining at his lot. If he was miserable, he was laughed at; and he soon learned to laugh at his own miseries, as well as to laugh back at his comrades. [Pg 56]

CHAPTER II.

The business of the rendezvous occupied about a month. In this period the men, Indian allies, and other Indian parties who usually visited the camp at this time, were all supplied with goods. The remaining merchandise was adjusted for the convenience of the different traders who should be sent out through all the country traversed by the company. Sublette then decided upon their routes, dividing up his forces into camps, which took each its appointed course, detaching as it proceeded small parties of trappers to all the hunting grounds in the neighborhood. These smaller camps were ordered to meet at certain times and places, to report progress, collect and cache their furs, and "count noses." If certain parties failed to arrive, others were sent out in search for them.

This year, in the absence of Smith and Jackson, a considerable party was dispatched, under Milton Sublette, brother of the Captain, and two other free trappers and traders, Frapp and Jervais, to traverse the country down along the Bighorn River. Captain Sublette took a large party, among whom was Joe Meek, across the mountains to trap on the Snake River, in opposition to the Hudson's Bay Company. The Rocky Mountain Fur Company had hitherto avoided this country, except when Smith had once crossed to the head-waters of the Snake with a small party of five

trappers. But Smith and Sublette had determined to oppose themselves to the British traders who occupied so large an extent of territory presumed to be American; and it had been agreed between them to meet this year on Snake River on Sublette's return from St. Louis, and Smith's from his California tour. What befel Smith's party before reaching the Columbia, has already been related; also his reception by the Hudson's Bay Company, and his departure from Vancouver. [Pg 58]

Sublette led his company up the valley of the Wind River, across the mountains, and on to the very head-waters of the Lewis or Snake River. Here he fell in with Jackson, in the valley of Lewis Lake, called Jackson's Hole, and remained on the borders of this lake for some time, waiting for Smith, whose non-appearance began to create a good deal of uneasiness. At length runners were dispatched in all directions looking for the lost Booshway.

The detachment to which Meek was assigned had the pleasure and honor of discovering the hiding place of the missing partner, which was in Pierre's Hole, a mountain valley about thirty miles long and of half that width, which subsequently was much frequented by the camps of the various fur companies. He was found trapping and exploring, in company with four men only, one of whom was Black, who with him escaped from the Umpqua Indians, as before related.

Notwithstanding the excitement and elation attendant upon the success of his party, Meek found time to admire the magnificent scenery of the valley, which is bounded on two sides by broken and picturesque ranges, and overlooked by that magnificent group of mountains, called the Three Tetons, towering to a height of fourteen thousand feet. This emerald cup set in its rim of amethystine mountains, was so pleasant a sight to the mountain-men that camp was moved to it without delay, where it remained until some time in September, recruiting its animals and preparing for the fall hunt. [Pg 59]

Here again the trappers indulged in their noisy sports and rejoicing, ostensibly on account of the return of the long-absent Booshway. There was little said of the men who had perished in that unfortunate expedition. "Poor fellow! out of luck;" was the usual burial rite which the memory of a dead comrade received. So much and no more. They could indulge in noisy rejoicings over a lost comrade restored; but the dead one was not mentioned. Nor was this apparently heartless and heedless manner so irrational or unfeeling as it seemed. Everybody understood one thing in the mountains—that he must keep his life by his own courage and valor, or at the least by his own prudence. Unseen dangers always lay in wait for him. The arrow or tomahawk of the Indian, the blow of the grizzly bear, the mis-step on the dizzy or slippery height, the rush of boiling and foaming floods, freezing cold, famine—these were the most common forms of peril, yet did not embrace even then all the forms in which Death sought his victims in the wilderness. The avoidance of painful reminders, such as the loss of a party of men, was a natural instinct, involving also a principle of self defence—since to have weak hearts would be the surest road to defeat in the next dangerous encounter. To keep their hearts "big," they must be gay, they must not remember the miserable fate of many of their one-time comrades. Think of that, stern moralist and martinet in propriety! Your fur collar hangs in the gas-lighted hall. In your luxurious dressing gown and slippers, by the warmth of a glowing grate, you muse upon the depravity of your fellow men. But imagine yourself, if you can, in the heart of an interminable wilderness. Let the snow be three or four feet deep, game scarce, Indians on your track: escaped from these dangers, once more beside a camp fire, with a roast of buffalo meat on a stick before it, and several of your companions similarly escaped, and destined for the same chances to-morrow, around you. Do you fancy you should give much time to lamenting the less lucky fellows who were left behind frozen, starved, or scalped? Not you. You would be fortifying yourself against to-morrow, when the same terrors might lay in wait for you. Jedediah Smith was a pious man; one of the few that ever resided in the Rocky Mountains, and led a band of reckless trappers; but he did not turn back to his camp when he saw it attacked on the Umpqua, nor stop to lament his murdered men. The law of self-preservation is strong in the wilderness. "Keep up your heart to-day, for to-morrow you may die," is the motto of the trapper. [Pg 60]

In the conference which took place between Smith and Sublette, the former insisted that on account of the kind services of the Hudson's Bay Company toward himself and the three other survivors of his party, they should withdraw their trappers and traders from the western side of the mountains for the present, so as not to have them come in conflict with those of that company. To this proposition Sublette reluctantly consented, and orders were issued for moving once more to the east, before going into winter camp, which was appointed for the Wind River Valley.

In the meantime Joe Meek was sent out with a party to take his first hunt for beaver as a hired trapper. The detachment to which he belonged traveled down Pierre's fork, the stream which watered the valley of Pierre's Hole, to its junction with Lewis' and Henry's forks where they unite to form the great Snake River. While trapping in this locality the party became aware of the vicinity of a roving band of Blackfeet, and in consequence, redoubled their usual precautions while on the march. [Pg 61]

The Blackfeet were the tribe most dreaded in the Rocky Mountains, and went by the name of "Bugs Boys," which rendered into good English, meant "the devil's own." They are now so well known that to mention their characteristics seems like repeating a "twice-told tale;" but as they will appear so often in this narrative, Irving's account of them as he had it from Bonneville when he was fresh from the mountains, will, after all, not be out of place. "These savages," he says, "are the most dangerous banditti of the mountains, and the inveterate foe of the trapper. They are Ishmaelites of the first order, always with weapon in hand, ready for action. The young braves of the tribe, who are destitute of property, go to war for booty; to gain horses, and acquire the means of setting up a lodge, supporting a family, and entitling themselves to a seat in the public councils. The veteran warriors fight merely for the love of the thing, and the consequence which success gives them among their people. They are capital horsemen, and are generally well mounted on short, stout horses, similar to the prairie ponies, to be met with in St. Louis. When on a war party, however, they go on foot, to enable them to skulk through the country with greater secrecy; to keep in thickets and ravines, and use more adroit subterfuges and stratagems. Their mode of warfare is entirely by ambush, surprise, and sudden assaults in the night time. If they succeed in causing a panic, they dash forward with headlong fury; if the enemy is on the alert, and shows no signs of fear, they become wary and deliberate in their movements.

"Some of them are armed in the primitive style, with bows and arrows; the greater part have American fusees, made after the fashion of those of the Hudson's Bay Company. These they procure at the trading post of the American Fur Company, on Maria's River, where they traffic their peltries for arms, ammunition, clothing, and [Pg 62] trinkets. They are extremely fond of spirituous liquors and tobacco, for which nuisances they are ready to exchange, not merely their guns and horses, but even their wives and daughters. As they are a treacherous race, and have cherished a lurking hostility to the whites, ever since one of their tribe was killed by Mr. Lewis, the associate of General Clarke, in his exploring expedition across the Rocky Mountains, the American Fur Company is obliged constantly to keep at their post a garrison of sixty or seventy men."

"Under the general name of Blackfeet are comprehended several tribes, such as the Surcies, the Peagans, the Blood Indians, and the Gros Ventres of the Prairies, who roam about the Southern branches of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers, together with some other tribes further north. The bands infesting the Wind River Mountains, and the country adjacent, at the time of which we are treating, were Gros Ventres *of the Prairies*, which are not to be confounded with the Gros Ventres *of the Missouri*, who keep about the *lower* part of that river, and are friendly to the white men."

"This hostile band keeps about the head-waters of the Missouri, and numbers about nine hundred fighting men. Once in the course of two or three years they abandon their usual abodes and make a visit to the Arapahoes of the Arkansas. Their route lies either through the Crow country, and the Black Hills, or through the lands of the Nez Perces, Flatheads, Bannacks, and Shoshonies. As they enjoy their favorite state of hostility with all these tribes, their expeditions are prone to be conducted in the most lawless and predatory style; nor do they hesitate to extend their maraudings to any party of white men they meet with, following their trail, hovering about their camps, [Pg 63] waylaying and dogging the caravans of the free traders, and murdering the solitary trapper. The consequences are frequent and desperate fights between them and the mountaineers, in the wild defiles and fastnesses of the Rocky Mountains." Such were the Blackfeet at the period of which we are writing; nor has their character changed at this day, as many of the Montana miners know to their cost.

CHAPTER III.

1830. Sublette's camp commenced moving back to the east side of the Rocky Mountains in October. Its course was up Henry's fork of the Snake River, through the North Pass to Missouri Lake, in which rises the Madison fork of the Missouri River. The beaver were very plenty on Henry's fork, and our young trapper had great success in making up his packs; having learned the art of setting his traps very readily. The manner in which the trapper takes his game is as follows:—

He has an ordinary steel trap weighing five pounds, attached to a chain five feet long, with a swivel and ring at the end, which plays round what is called the *float*, a dry stick of wood, about six feet long. The trapper wades out into the stream, which is shallow, and cuts with his knife a bed for the trap, five or six inches under water. He then takes the float out the whole length of the chain in the direction of the centre of the stream, and drives it into the mud, so fast that the beaver cannot draw it out; at the same time tying the other end by a thong to the bank. A small stick or twig, dipped in musk or castor, serves for bait, and is placed so as to hang directly above the trap, which is now set. The trapper then throws water plentifully over the adjacent bank to conceal any foot prints or scent by which the beaver would be

alarmed, and going to some distance wades out of the stream.

In setting a trap, several things are to be observed with care:—first, that the trap is firmly fixed, and the proper distance from the bank—for if the beaver can get on [Pg 65] shore with the trap, he will cut off his foot to escape: secondly, that the float is of dry wood, for should it not be, the little animal will cut it off at a stroke, and swimming with the trap to the middle of the dam, be drowned by its weight. In the latter case, when the hunter visits his traps in the morning, he is under the necessity of plunging into the water and swimming out to dive for the missing trap, and his game. Should the morning be frosty and chill, as it very frequently is in the mountains, diving for traps is not the pleasantest exercise. In placing the bait, care must be taken to fix it just where the beaver in reaching it will spring the trap. If the bait-stick be placed high, the hind foot of the beaver will be caught: if low, his fore foot.

The manner in which the beavers make their dam, and construct their lodge, has long been reckoned among the wonders of the animal creation; and while some observers have claimed for the little creature more sagacity than it really possesses, its instinct is still sufficiently wonderful. It is certainly true that it knows how to keep the water of a stream to a certain level, by means of an obstruction; and that it cuts down trees for the purpose of backing up the water by a dam. It is not true, however, that it can always fell a tree in the direction required for this purpose. The timber about a beaver dam is felled in all directions; but as trees that grow near the water, generally lean towards it, the tree, when cut, takes the proper direction by gravitation alone. The beaver then proceeds to cut up the fallen timber into lengths of about three feet, and to convey them to the spot where the dam is to be situated, securing them in their places by means of mud and stones. The work is commenced when the water is low, and carried on as it rises, until it has attained the desired [Pg 66] height. And not only is it made of the requisite height and strength, but its shape is suited exactly to the nature of the stream in which it is built. If the water is sluggish the dam is straight; if rapid and turbulent, the barrier is constructed of a convex form, the better to resist the action of the water.

BEAVER-DAM.

When the beavers have once commenced a dam, its extent and thickness are continually augmented, not only by their labors, but by accidental accumulations; thus accommodating itself to the size of the growing community. At length, after a lapse of many years, the water being spread over a considerable tract, and filled up by yearly accumulations of drift-wood and earth, seeds take root in the new made ground, and the old beaver-dams become green meadows, or thickets of cotton-wood and willow.

The food on which the beaver subsists, is the bark of the young trees in its neighborhood; and when laying up a winter store, the whole community join in the labor of selecting, cutting up, and carrying the strips to their store-houses under [Pg 67] water. They do not, as some writers have affirmed, when cutting wood for a dam strip off the bark and store it in their lodges for winter consumption; but only carry under water the stick with the bark on.

> "The beaver has two incisors and eight molars in each jaw; and empty hollows where the canine teeth might be. The upper pair of cutting teeth extend far into the jaw, with a curve of rather more than a semicircle; and the lower pair of incisors form rather less than a semicircle. Sometimes, one of these teeth gets broken and then the opposite tooth continues growing until it forms a nearly complete circle. The chewing muscle of the beaver is strengthened by tendons in such a way as to give it great power. But more is needed to enable the beaver to eat wood. The insalivation of the dry food is provided for by the extraordinary size of the salivary glands.
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> "Now, every part of these instruments is of vital importance to the beavers. The loss of an incisor involves the formation of an obstructive circular tooth; deficiency of saliva renders the food indigestible; and when old age comes and the enamel is worn down faster than it is renewed, the beaver is not longer able to cut branches for its support. Old, feeble and poor, unable to borrow, and ashamed to beg, he steals cuttings, and subjects himself to the penalty assigned to theft. Aged beavers are often found dead with gashes in their bodies, showing that they have been killed by their mates. In the

fall of 1864, a very aged beaver was caught in one of the dams of the Esconawba River, and this was the reflection of a great authority on the occasion, one Ah-she-goes, an Ojibwa trapper: 'Had he escaped the trap he would have been killed before the winter was over, by other beavers, for stealing cuttings.'

"When the beavers are about two or three years old, their teeth are in their best condition for cutting. On the Upper Missouri, they cut the cotton tree and the willow bush; around Hudson's Bay and Lake Superior, in addition to the willow they cut the poplar and maple, hemlock, spruce and pine. The cutting is round and round, and deepest upon the side on which they wish the tree to fall. Indians and trappers have seen beavers cutting trees. The felling of a tree is a family affair. No more than a single pair with two or three young ones are engaged at a time. The adults take the cutting in turns, one gnawing and the other watching; and occasionally a youngster trying his incisors. The beaver whilst gnawing sits on his plantigrade hind legs, which keep him conveniently upright. When the tree begins to crackle the beavers work cautiously, and when it crashes down they plunge into the pond, fearful lest the noise should attract an enemy to the spot. After the tree-fall, comes the lopping of the branches. A single tree may be winter provision for a family. Branches five or six inches thick have to be cut into proper lengths for transport, and are then taken home."

The lodge of a beaver is generally about six feet in diameter, on the inside, and about half as high. They are rounded or dome-shaped on the outside, with very thick walls, and communicate with the land by subterranean passages, below the depth at which the water freezes in winter. Each lodge is made to accommodate several inmates, who have their beds ranged round the walls, much as the Indian does in his tent. They are very cleanly, too, and after eating, carry out the sticks that have been stripped, and either use them in repairing their dam, or throw them into the stream below. [Pg 68]

During the summer months the beavers abandon their lodges, and disport themselves about the streams, sometimes going on long journeys; or if any remain at home, they are the mothers of young families. About the last of August the community returns to its home, and begins preparations for the domestic cares of the long winter months.

An exception to this rule is that of certain individuals, who have no families, make no dam, and never live in lodges, but burrow in subterranean tunnels. They are always found to be males, whom the French trappers call "les parasseux," or idlers; and the American trappers, "bachelors." Several of them are sometimes found in one abode, which the trappers facetiously denominate "bachelor's hall." Being taken with less difficulty than the more domestic beaver, the trapper is always glad to come upon their habitations.

The trapping season is usually in the spring and autumn. But should the hunters find it necessary to continue their work in winter, they capture the beaver by sounding on the ice until an aperture is discovered, when the ice is cut away and the opening closed up. Returning to the bank, they search for the subterranean passage, tracing its connection with the lodge; and by patient watching succeed in catching the beaver on some of its journeys between the water and the land. This, however, is not often resorted to when the hunt in the fall has been successful; or when not urged by famine to take the beaver for food. [Pg 69]

"Occasionally it happens," says Captain Bonneville, "that several members of a beaver family are trapped in succession. The survivors then become extremely shy, and can scarcely be "brought to medicine," to use the trappers' phrase for "taking the bait." In such case, the trapper gives up the use of the bait, and conceals his traps in the usual paths and crossing places of the household. The beaver being now completely "up to trap," approaches them cautiously, and springs them, ingeniously, with a stick. At other times, he turns the traps bottom upwards, by the same means, and occasionally even drags them to the barrier, and conceals them in the mud. The trapper now gives up the contest of ingenuity, and shouldering his traps, marches off, admitting that he is not yet "up to beaver."

Before the camp moved from the forks of the Snake River, the haunting Blackfeet made their appearance openly. It was here that Meek had his first battle with that nation, with whom he subsequently had many a savage contest. They attacked the camp early in the morning, just as the call to turn out had sounded. But they had miscalculated their opportunity: the design having evidently been to stampede the horses and mules, at the hour and moment of their being turned loose to graze. They had been too hasty by a few minutes, so that when they charged on the camp pell-mell, firing a hundred guns at once, to frighten both horses and men, it happened that only a few of the animals had been turned out, and they had not yet got far off. The noise of the charge only turned them back to camp. [Pg 70]

In an instant's time, Fitzpatrick was mounted, and commanding the men to follow, he galloped at headlong speed round and round the camp, to drive back such of the horses as were straying, or had been frightened from their pickets. In this race, two horses were shot under him; but he escaped, and the camp-horses were saved. The

battle now was to punish the thieves. They took their position, as usual with Indian fighters, in a narrow ravine; from whence the camp was forced to dislodge them, at a great disadvantage. This they did do, at last, after six hours of hard fighting, in which a few men were wounded, but none killed. The thieves skulked off, through the canyon, when they found themselves defeated, and were seen no more until the camp came to the woods which cover the western slope of the Rocky Mountains.

But as the camp moved eastward, or rather in a northeasterly direction, through the pine forests between Pierre's Hole and the head-waters of the Missouri, it was continually harrassed by Blackfeet, and required a strong guard at night, when these marauders delighted to make an attack. The weather by this time was very cold in the mountains, and chilled the marrow of our young Virginian. The travel was hard, too, and the recruits pretty well worn out.

One cold night, Meek was put on guard on the further side of the camp, with a veteran named Reese. But neither the veteran nor the youngster could resist the approaches of "tired Nature's sweet restorer," and went to sleep at their post of duty. When, during the night, Sublette came out of his tent and gave the challenge—"All's well!" there was no reply. To quote Meek's own language, "Sublette came round the horse-pen swearing and snorting. He was powerful mad. Before he got to where Reese was, he made so much noise that he waked him; and Reese, in a loud whisper, [Pg 71] called to him, 'Down, Billy! Indians!' Sublette got down on his belly mighty quick. 'Whar? whar?' he asked.

"'They were right there when you hollered so,' said Reese.

"'Where is Meek?' whispered Sublette.

"'He is trying to shoot one,' answered Reese, still in a whisper.

"Reese then crawled over to whar I war, and told me what had been said, and informed me what to do. In a few minutes I crept cautiously over to Reese's post, when Sublette asked me how many Indians had been thar, and I told him I couldn't make out their number. In the morning a pair of Indian moccasins war found whar Reese *saw the Indians*, which I had *taken care to leave there*; and thus confirmed, our story got us the credit of vigilance, instead of our receiving our just dues for neglect of duty."

It was sometime during the fall hunt in the Pine Woods, on the west side of the Rocky Mountains, that Meek had one of his earliest adventures with a bear. Two comrades, Craig and Nelson, and himself, while out trapping, left their horses, and traveled up a creek on foot, in search of beaver. They had not proceeded any great distance, before they came suddenly face to face with a red bear; so suddenly, indeed, that the men made a spring for the nearest trees. Craig and Meek ascended a large pine, which chanced to be nearest, and having many limbs, was easy to climb. Nelson happened to take to one of two small trees that grew close together; and the bear, fixing upon him for a victim, undertook to climb after him. With his back against one of these small trees, and his feet against the other, his bearship succeeded in reaching a point not far below Nelson's perch, when the trees opened with his [Pg 72] weight, and down he went, with a shock that fairly shook the ground. But this bad luck only seemed to infuriate the beast, and up he went again, with the same result, each time almost reaching his enemy. With the second tumble he was not the least discouraged; but started up the third time, only to be dashed once more to the ground when he had attained a certain height. At the third fall, however, he became thoroughly disgusted with his want of success, and turned and ran at full speed into the woods.

"Then," says Meek, "Craig began to sing, and I began to laugh; but Nelson took to swearing. 'O yes, you can laugh and sing now,' says Nelson; 'but you war quiet enough when the bear was around.' 'Why, Nelson,' I answered, 'you wouldn't have us noisy before that distinguished guest of yours?' But Nelson damned the wild beast; and Craig and I laughed, and said he didn't seem wild a bit. That's the way we hector each other in the mountains. If a man gets into trouble he is only laughed at: 'let him keep out; let him have better luck,' is what we say."

The country traversed by Sublette in the fall of 1829, was unknown at that period, even to the fur companies, they having kept either farther to the south or to the north. Few, if any, white men had passed through it since Lewis and Clarke discovered the head-waters of the Missouri and the Snake Rivers, which flow from the opposite sides of the same mountain peaks. Even the toils and hardships of passing over mountains at this season of the year, did not deprive the trapper of the enjoyment of the magnificent scenery the region afforded. Splendid views, however, could not long beguile men who had little to eat, and who had yet a long journey to accomplish in cold, and surrounded by dangers, before reaching the wintering [Pg 73] ground.

In November the camp left Missouri Lake on the east side of the mountains, and crossed over, still northeasterly, on to the Gallatin fork of the Missouri River, passing

over a very rough and broken country. They were, in fact, still in the midst of mountains, being spurs of the great Rocky range, and equally high and rugged. A particularly high mountain lay between them and the main Yellowstone River. This they had just crossed, with great fatigue and difficulty, and were resting the camp and horses for a few days on the river's bank, when the Blackfeet once more attacked them in considerable numbers. Two men were killed in this fight, and the camp thrown into confusion by the suddenness of the alarm. Capt. Sublette, however, got off, with most of his men, still pursued by the Indians.

Not so our Joe, who this time was not in luck, but was cut off from camp, alone, and had to flee to the high mountains overlooking the Yellowstone. Here was a situation for a nineteen-year-old raw recruit! Knowing that the Blackfeet were on the trail of the camp, it was death to proceed in that direction. Some other route must be taken to come up with them; the country was entirely unknown to him; the cold severe; his mule, blanket, and gun, his only earthly possessions. On the latter he depended for food, but game was scarce; and besides, he thought the sound of his gun would frighten himself, so alone in the wilderness, swarming with stealthy foes.

Hiding his mule in a thicket, he ascended to the mountain top to take a view of the country, and decide upon his course. And what a scene was that for the miserable boy, whose chance of meeting with his comrades again was small indeed! At his feet rolled the Yellowstone River, coursing away through the great plain to the eastward. [Pg 74] To the north his eye follows the windings of the Missouri, as upon a map, but playing at hide-and-seek in amongst the mountains. Looking back, he saw the River Snake stretching its serpentine length through lava plains, far away, to its junction with the Columbia. To the north, and to the south, one white mountain rose above another as far as the eye could reach. What a mighty and magnificent world it seemed, to be alone in! Poor Joe succumbed to the influence of the thought, and wept.

Having indulged in this sole remaining luxury of life, Joe picked up his resolution, and decided upon his course. To the southeast lay the Crow country, a land of plenty, —as the mountain-man regards plenty,—and there he could at least live; provided the Crows permitted him to do so. Besides, he had some hopes of falling in with one of the camps, by taking that course.

Descending the mountain to the hiding-place of his mule, by which time it was dark night, hungry and freezing, Joe still could not light a fire, for fear of revealing his whereabouts to the Indians; nor could he remain to perish with cold. Travel he must, and travel he did, going he scarcely knew whither. Looking back upon the terrors and discomforts of that night, the veteran mountaineer yet regards it as about the most miserable one of his life. When day at length broke, he had made, as well as he could estimate the distance, about thirty miles. Traveling on toward the southeast, he had crossed the Yellowstone River, and still among the mountains, was obliged to abandon his mule and accoutrements, retaining only one blanket and his gun. Neither the mule nor himself had broken fast in the last two days. Keeping a southerly course for twenty miles more, over a rough and elevated country, he came, [Pg 75] on the evening of the third day, upon a band of mountain sheep. With what eagerness did he hasten to kill, cook, and eat! Three days of fasting was, for a novice, quite sufficient to provide him with an appetite.

Having eaten voraciously, and being quite overcome with fatigue, Joe fell asleep in his blanket, and slumbered quite deeply until morning. With the morning came biting blasts from the north, that made motion necessary if not pleasant. Refreshed by sleep and food, our traveler hastened on upon his solitary way, taking with him what sheep-meat he could carry, traversing the same rough and mountainous country as before. No incidents nor alarms varied the horrible and monotonous solitude of the wilderness. The very absence of anything to alarm was awful; for the bravest man is wretchedly nervous in the solitary presence of sublime Nature. Even the veteran hunter of the mountains can never entirely divest himself of this feeling of awe, when his single soul comes face to face with God's wonderful and beautiful handiwork.

At the close of the fourth day, Joe made his lonely camp in a deep defile of the mountains, where a little fire and some roasted mutton again comforted his inner and outer man, and another night's sleep still farther refreshed his wearied frame. On the following morning, a very bleak and windy one, having breakfasted on his remaining piece of mutton, being desirous to learn something of the progress he had made, he ascended a low mountain in the neighborhood of his camp—and behold! the whole country beyond was smoking with the vapor from boiling springs, and burning with gasses, issuing from small craters, each of which was emitting a sharp whistling sound.

When the first surprise of this astonishing scene had passed, Joe began to admire its [Pg 76] effect in an artistic point of view. The morning being clear, with a sharp frost, he thought himself reminded of the city of Pittsburg, as he had beheld it on a winter morning, a couple of years before. This, however, related only to the rising smoke and vapor; for the extent of the volcanic region was immense, reaching far out of sight. The general face of the country was smooth and rolling, being a level plain,

dotted with cone-shaped mounds. On the summits of these mounds were small craters from four to eight feet in diameter. Interspersed among these, on the level plain, were larger craters, some of them from four to six miles across. Out of these craters issued blue flames and molten brimstone.

For some minutes Joe gazed and wondered. Curious thoughts came into his head, about hell and the day of doom. With that natural tendency to reckless gayety and humorous absurdities which some temperaments are sensible of in times of great excitement, he began to soliloquize. Said he, to himself, "I have been told the sun would be blown out, and the earth burnt up. If this infernal wind keeps up, I shouldn't be surprised if the sun war blown out. If the earth is *not* burning up over thar, then it is that place the old Methodist preacher used to threaten me with. Any way it suits me to go and see what it's like."

On descending to the plain described, the earth was found to have a hollow sound, and seemed threatening to break through. But Joe found the warmth of the place most delightful, after the freezing cold of the mountains, and remarked to himself again, that "if it war hell, it war a more agreeable climate than he had been in for some time."

He had thought the country entirely desolate, as not a living creature had been seen [Pg 77] in the vicinity; but while he stood gazing about him in curious amazement, he was startled by the report of two guns, followed by the Indian yell. While making rapid preparations for defence and flight, if either or both should be necessary, a familiar voice greeted him with the exclamation, "It *is* old Joe!" When the adjective "old" is applied to one of Meek's age at that time, it is generally understood to be a term of endearment. "My feelings you may imagine," says the "old Uncle Joe" of the present time, in recalling the adventure.

Being joined by these two associates, who had been looking for him, our traveler, no longer simply a raw recruit, but a hero of wonderful adventures, as well as the rest of the men, proceeded with them to camp, which they overtook the third day, attempting to cross the high mountains between the Yellowstone and the Bighorn Rivers. If Meek had seen hard times in the mountains alone, he did not find them much improved in camp. The snow was so deep that the men had to keep in advance, and break the road for the animals; and to make their condition still more trying, there were no provisions in camp, nor any prospect of plenty, for men or animals, until they should reach the buffalo country beyond the mountains.

During this scarcity of provisions, some of those amusing incidents took place with which the mountaineer will contrive to lighten his own and his comrades' spirits, even in periods of the greatest suffering. One which we have permission to relate, has reference to what Joe Meek calls the "meanest act of his life."

While the men were starving, a negro boy, belonging to Jedediah Smith, by some means was so fortunate as to have caught a porcupine, which he was roasting before the fire. Happening to turn his back for a moment, to observe something in camp, [Pg 78] Meek and Reese snatched the tempting viand and made off with it, before the darkey discovered his loss. But when it was discovered, what a wail went up for the embezzled porcupine! Suspicion fixed upon the guilty parties, but as no one would 'peach on white men to save a "nigger's" rights, the poor, disappointed boy could do nothing but lament in vain, to the great amusement of the men, who upon the principle that "misery loves company," rather chuckled over than condemned Meek's "mean act."

There was a sequel, however, to this little story. So much did the negro dwell upon the event, and the heartlessness of the men towards him, that in the following summer, when Smith was in St. Louis, he gave the boy his freedom and two hundred dollars, and left him in that city; so that it became a saying in the mountains, that "the nigger got his freedom for a porcupine."

During this same march, a similar joke was played upon one of the men named Craig. He had caught a rabbit and put it up to roast before the fire—a tempting looking morsel to starving mountaineers. Some of his associates determined to see how it tasted, and Craig was told that the Booshways wished to speak with him at their lodge. While he obeyed this supposed command, the rabbit was spirited away, never more to be seen by mortal man. When Craig returned to the camp-fire, and beheld the place vacant where a rabbit so late was nicely roasting, his passion knew no bounds, and he declared his intention of cutting it out of the stomach that contained it. But as finding the identical stomach which contained it involved the cutting open of many that probably did not, in the search, he was fain to relinquish that mode of vengeance, together with his hopes of a supper. As Craig is still living, and is tormented by the belief that he knows the man who stole his rabbit, Mr. Meek takes [Pg 79] this opportunity of assuring him, upon the word of a gentleman, that *he* is not the man.

While on the march over these mountains, owing to the depth of the snow, the company lost a hundred head of horses and mules, which sank in the yet unfrozen

drifts, and could not be extricated. In despair at their situation, Jedediah Smith one day sent a man named Harris to the top of a high peak to take a view of the country, and ascertain their position. After a toilsome scramble the scout returned.

"Well, what did you see, Harris?" asked Smith anxiously.

"I saw the city of St. Louis, and one fellow taking a drink!" replied Harris; prefacing the assertion with a shocking oath.

Smith asked no more questions. He understood by the man's answer that he had made no pleasing discoveries; and knew that they had still a weary way before them to reach the plains below. Besides, Smith was a religious man, and the coarse profanity of the mountaineers was very distasteful to him. "A very mild man, and a christian; and there were very few of them in the mountains," is the account given of him by the mountaineers themselves.

The camp finally arrived without loss of life, except to the animals, on the plains of the Bighorn River, and came upon the waters of the Stinking Fork, a branch of this river, which derives its unfortunate appellation from the fact that it flows through a volcanic tract similar to the one discovered by Meek on the Yellowstone plains. This place afforded as much food for wonder to the whole camp, as the former one had to Joe; and the men unanimously pronounced it the "back door to that country which divines preach about." As this volcanic district had previously been seen by one of [Pg 80] Lewis and Clarke's men, named Colter, while on a solitary hunt, and by him also denominated "hell," there must certainly have been something very suggestive in its appearance.

If the mountains had proven barren, and inhospitably cold, this hot and sulphurous country offered no greater hospitality. In fact, the fumes which pervaded the air rendered it exceedingly noxious to every living thing, and the camp was fain to push on to the main stream of the Bighorn River. Here signs of trappers became apparent, and spies having been sent out discovered a camp of about forty men, under Milton Sublette, brother of Captain William Sublette, the same that had been detached the previous summer to hunt in that country. Smith and Sublette then cached their furs, and moving up the river joined the camp of M. Sublette.

The manner of caching furs is this: A pit is dug to a depth of five or six feet in which to stand. The men then drift from this under a bank of solid earth, and excavate a room of considerable dimensions, in which the furs are deposited, and the apartment closed up. The pit is then filled up with earth, and the traces of digging obliterated or concealed. These caches are the only storehouses of the wilderness.

While the men were recruiting themselves in the joint camp, the alarm of "Indians!" was given, and hurried cries of "shoot! shoot!" were uttered on the instant. Captain Sublette, however, checked this precipitation, and ordering the men to hold, allowed the Indians to approach, making signs of peace. They proved to be a war party of Crows, who after smoking the pipe of peace with the Captain, received from him a present of some tobacco, and departed. [Pg 81]

As soon as the camp was sufficiently recruited for traveling, the united companies set out again toward the south, and crossed the Horn mountains once more into Wind River Valley; having had altogether, a successful fall hunt, and made some important explorations, notwithstanding the severity of the weather and the difficulty of mountain traveling. It was about Christmas when the camp arrived on Wind River, and the cold intense. While the men celebrated Christmas, as best they might under the circumstances, Capt. Sublette started to St. Louis with one man, Harris, called among mountain-men Black Harris, on snowshoes, with a train of pack-dogs. Such was the indomitable energy and courage of this famous leader!

CHAPTER IV.

1830. The furs collected by Jackson's company were cached on the Wind River; and the cold still being very severe, and game scarce, the two remaining leaders, Smith and Jackson, set out on the first of January with the whole camp, for the buffalo country, on the Powder River, a distance of about one hundred and fifty miles. "Times were hard in camp," when mountains had to be crossed in the depth of winter.

The animals had to be subsisted on the bark of the sweet cotton-wood, which grows along the streams and in the valleys on the east side of the Rocky Mountains, but is nowhere to be found west of that range. This way of providing for his horses and mules involved no trifling amount of labor, when each man had to furnish food for several of them. To collect this bark, the men carried the smooth limbs of the cotton-wood to camp, where, beside the camp-fire, they shaved off the sweet, green bark with a hunting-knife transformed into a drawing-knife by fastening a piece of wood to

its point; or, in case the cotton-wood was not convenient, the bark was peeled off, and carried to camp in a blanket. So nutritious is it, that animals fatten upon it quite as well as upon oats.

HUNTER'S WINTER CAMP.

In the large cotton-wood bottoms on the Yellowstone River, it sometimes became necessary to station a double guard to keep the buffalo out of camp, so numerous were they, when the severity of the cold drove them from the prairies to these cotton-wood thickets for subsistence. It was, therefore, of double importance to make [Pg 83] the winter camp where the cotton-wood was plenty; since not only did it furnish the animals of the camp with food, but by attracting buffalo, made game plenty for the men. To such a hunter's paradise on Powder River, the camp was now traveling, and arrived, after a hard, cold march, about the middle of January, when the whole encampment went into winter quarters, to remain until the opening of spring.

This was the occasion when the mountain-man "lived fat" and enjoyed life: a season of plenty, of relaxation, of amusement, of acquaintanceship with all the company, of gayety, and of "busy idleness." Through the day, hunting parties were coming and going, men were cooking, drying meat, making moccasins, cleaning their arms, wrestling, playing games, and, in short, everything that an isolated community of hardy men could resort to for occupation, was resorted to by these mountaineers. Nor was there wanting, in the appearance of the camp, the variety, and that picturesque air imparted by a mingling of the native element; for what with their Indian allies, their native wives, and numerous children, the mountaineers' camp was a motley assemblage; and the trappers themselves, with their affectation of Indian coxcombry, not the least picturesque individuals.

The change wrought in a wilderness landscape by the arrival of the grand camp was wonderful indeed. Instead of Nature's superb silence and majestic loneliness, there was the sound of men's voices in boisterous laughter, or the busy hum of conversation; the loud-resounding stroke of the axe; the sharp report of the rifle; the neighing of horses, and braying of mules; the Indian whoop and yell; and all that not unpleasing confusion of sound which accompanies the movements of the creature man. Over the plain, only dotted until now with shadows of clouds, or the transitory [Pg 84] passage of the deer, the antelope, or the bear, were scattered hundreds of lodges and immense herds of grazing animals. Even the atmosphere itself seemed changed from its original purity, and became clouded with the smoke from many camp-fires. And all this change might go as quickly as it came. The tent struck and the march resumed, solitude reigned once more, and only the cloud dotted the silent landscape.

If the day was busy and gleesome, the night had its charms as well. Gathered about the shining fires, groups of men in fantastic costumes told tales of marvelous adventures, or sung some old-remembered song, or were absorbed in games of chance. Some of the better educated men, who had once known and loved books, but whom some mishap in life had banished to the wilderness, recalled their favorite authors, and recited passages once treasured, now growing unfamiliar; or whispered to some chosen confrere the saddened history of his earlier years, and charged him thus and thus, should ever-ready death surprise himself in the next spring's hunt.

It will not be thought discreditable to our young trapper, Joe, that he learned to read by the light of the camp-fire. Becoming sensible, even in the wilderness, of the deficiencies of his early education, he found a teacher in a comrade, named Green, and soon acquired sufficient knowledge to enjoy an old copy of Shakspeare; which, with a Bible, was carried about with the property of the camp.

In this life of careless gayety and plenty, the whole company was allowed to remain without interruption, until the first of April, when it was divided, and once more started on the march. Jackson, or "Davey," as he was called by the men, with about half the company, left for the Snake country. The remainder, among whom was [Pg 85]

Meek, started north, with Smith for commander, and James Bridger as pilot.

Crossing the mountains, ranges of which divide the tributary streams of the Yellowstone from each other, the first halt was made on Tongue River. From thence the camp proceeded to the Bighorn River. Through all this country game was in abundance,—buffalo, elk, and bear, and beaver also plenty. In mountain phrase, "times were good on this hunt:" beaver packs increased in number, and both men and animals were in excellent condition.

A large party usually hunted out the beaver and frightened away the game in a few weeks, or days, from any one locality. When this happened the camp moved on; or, should not game be plenty, it kept constantly on the move, the hunters and trappers seldom remaining out more than a day or two. Should the country be considered dangerous on account of Indians, it was the habit of the men to return every night to the encampment.

It was the design of Smith to take his command into the Blackfoot country, a region abounding in the riches which he sought, could they only be secured without coming into too frequent conflict with the natives: always a doubtful question concerning these savages. He had proceeded in this direction as far as Bovey's Fork of the Bighorn, when the camp was overtaken by a heavy fall of snow, which made traveling extremely difficult, and which, when melted, caused a sudden great rise in the mountain streams. In attempting to cross Bovey's Fork during the high water, he had thirty horses swept away, with three hundred traps: a serious loss in the business of hunting beaver.

In the manner described, pushing on through an unknown country, hunting and trapping as they moved, the company proceeded, passing another low chain of mountains, through a pass called Pryor's Gap, to Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone, thence to Rose-Bud River, and finally to the main Yellowstone River, where it makes a great bend to the east, enclosing a large plain covered with grass, and having also extensive cotton-wood bottoms, which subsequently became a favorite wintering ground of the fur companies. [Pg 86]

It was while trapping up in this country, on the Rose-Bud River, that an amusing adventure befel our trapper Joe. Being out with two other trappers, at some distance from the great camp, they had killed and supped off a fat buffalo cow. The night was snowy, and their camp was made in a grove of young aspens. Having feasted themselves, the remaining store of choice pieces was divided between, and placed, hunter fashion, under the heads of the party, on their betaking themselves to their blanket couches for the night. Neither Indian nor wild beast disturbed their repose, as they slept, with their guns beside them, filled with comfort and plenty. But who ever dreams of the presence of a foe under such circumstances? Certainly not our young trapper, who was only awakened about day-break by something very large and heavy walking over him, and snuffing about him with a most insulting freedom. It did not need Yankee powers of guessing to make out who the intruder in camp might be: in truth, it was only too disagreeably certain that it was a full sized grizzly bear, whose keenness of smell had revealed to him the presence of fat cow-meat in that neighborhood.

"You may be sure," says Joe, "that I kept very quiet, while that bar helped himself to some of my buffalo meat, and went a little way off to eat it. But Mark Head, one of the men, raised up, and back came the bar. Down went our heads under the blankets, and I kept mine covered pretty snug, while the beast took another walk over the bed, but finally went off again to a little distance. Mitchel then wanted to shoot; but I said, 'no, no; hold on, or the brute will kill us, sure.' When the bar heard our voices, back he run again, and jumped on the bed as before. I'd have been happy to have felt myself sinking ten feet under ground, while that bar promenaded over and around us! However, he couldn't quite make out our style, and finally took fright, and ran off down the mountain. Wanting to be revenged for his impudence, I went after him, and seeing a good chance, shot him dead. Then I took my turn at running over him awhile!" [Pg 87]

Such are the not infrequent incidents of the trapper's life, which furnish him with material, needing little embellishment to convert it into those wild tales with which the nights are whiled away around the winter camp-fire.

Arrived at the Yellowstone with his company, Smith found it necessary, on account of the high water, to construct Bull-boats for the crossing. These are made by stitching together buffalo hides, stretching them over light frames, and paying the seams with elk tallow and ashes. In these light wherries the goods and people were ferried over, while the horses and mules were crossed by swimming.

The mode usually adopted in crossing large rivers, was to spread the lodges on the ground, throwing on them the light articles, saddles, etc. A rope was then run through the pin-holes around the edge of each, when it could be drawn up like a reticule. It was then filled with the heavier camp goods, and being tightly drawn up, formed a perfect ball. A rope being tied to it, it was launched on the water, the

children of the camp on top, and the women swimming after and clinging to it, while a man, who had the rope in his hand, swam ahead holding on to his horse's mane. In this way, dancing like a cork on the waves, the lodge was piloted across; and passengers as well as freight consigned, undamaged, to the opposite shore. A large camp of three hundred men, and one hundred women and children were frequently thus crossed in one hour's time. [Pg 88]

The camp was now in the excellent but inhospitable country of the Blackfeet, and the commander redoubled his precautions, moving on all the while to the Mussel Shell, and thence to the Judith River. Beaver were plenty and game abundant; but the vicinity of the large village of the Blackfeet made trapping impracticable. Their war upon the trappers was ceaseless; their thefts of traps and horses ever recurring: and Smith, finding that to remain was to be involved in incessant warfare, without hope of victory or gain, at length gave the command to turn back, which was cheerfully obeyed: for the trappers had been very successful on the spring hunt, and thinking discretion some part at least of valor, were glad to get safe out of the Blackfoot country with their rich harvest of beaver skins.

The return march was by the way of Pryor's Gap, and up the Bighorn, to Wind River, where the cache was made in the previous December. The furs were now taken out and pressed, ready for transportation across the plains. A party was also dispatched, under Mr. Tullock, to raise the cache on the Bighorn River. Among this party was Meek, and a Frenchman named Ponto. While digging to come at the fur, the bank above caved in, falling upon Meek and Ponto, killing the latter almost instantly. Meek, though severely hurt, was taken out alive: while poor Ponto was "rolled in a blanket, and pitched into the river." So rude were the burial services of the trapper of the Rocky Mountains. [Pg 89]

Meek was packed back to camp, along with the furs, where he soon recovered. Sublette arrived from St. Louis with fourteen wagons loaded with merchandise, and two hundred additional men for the service. Jackson also arrived from the Snake country with plenty of beaver, and the business of the yearly rendezvous began. Then the scenes previously described were re-enacted. Beaver, the currency of the mountains, was plenty that year, and goods were high accordingly. A thousand dollars a day was not too much for some of the most reckless to spend on their squaws, horses, alcohol, and themselves. For "alcohol" was the beverage of the mountaineers. Liquors could not be furnished to the men in that country. Pure alcohol was what they "got tight on;" and a desperate tight it was, to be sure!

An important change took place in the affairs of the Rocky Mountain Company at this rendezvous. The three partners, Smith, Sublette, and Jackson, sold out to a new firm, consisting of Milton Sublette, James Bridger, Fitzpatrick, Frapp, and Jervais; the new company retaining the same name and style as the old.

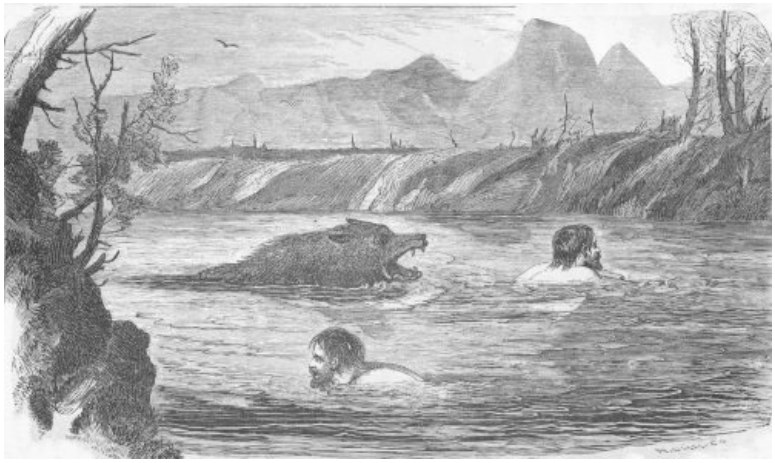
The old partners left for St. Louis, with a company of seventy men, to convoy the furs. Two of them never returned to the Rocky Mountains; one of them, Smith, being killed the following year, as will hereafter be related; and Jackson remaining in St. Louis, where, like a true mountain-man, he dissipated his large and hard-earned fortune in a few years. Captain Sublette, however, continued to make his annual trips to and from the mountains for a number of years; and until the consolidation of another wealthy company with the Rocky Mountain Company, continued to furnish goods to the latter, at a profit on St. Louis prices; his capital and experience enabling him to keep the new firm under his control to a large degree.

CHAPTER V.

1830. The whole country lying upon the Yellowstone and its tributaries, and about the head-waters of the Missouri, at the time of which we are writing, abounded not only in beaver, but in buffalo, bear, elk, antelope, and many smaller kinds of game. Indeed the buffalo used then to cross the mountains into the valleys about the head-waters of the Snake and Colorado Rivers, in such numbers that at certain seasons of the year, the plains and river bottoms swarmed with them. Since that day they have quite disappeared from the western slope of the Rocky Mountains, and are no longer seen in the same numbers on the eastern side.

Bear, although they did not go in herds, were rather uncomfortably numerous, and sometimes put the trapper to considerable trouble, and fright also; for very few were brave enough to willingly encounter the formidable grizzly, one blow of whose terrible paw, aimed generally at the hunter's head, if not arrested, lays him senseless and torn, an easy victim to the wrathful monster. A gunshot wound, if not directed with certainty to some vulnerable point, has only the effect to infuriate the beast, and make him trebly dangerous. From the fact that the bear always bites his wound, and commences to run with his head thus brought in the direction from which the ball comes, he is pretty likely to make a straight wake towards his enemy, whether

voluntarily or not; and woe be to the hunter who is not prepared for him, with a shot for his eye, or the spot just behind the ear, where certain death enters. [Pg 91]



THE THREE "BARES."

In the frequent encounters of the mountain-men with these huge beasts, many acts of wonderful bravery were performed, while some tragedies, and not a few comedies were enacted.

From something humorous in Joe Meek's organization, or some wonderful "luck" to which he was born, or both, the greater part of his adventures with bears, as with men, were of a humorous complexion; enabling him not only to have a story to tell, but one at which his companions were bound to laugh. One of these which happened during the fall hunt of 1830, we will let him tell for himself:

"The first fall on the Yellowstone, Hawkins and myself were coming up the river in search of camp, when we discovered a very large bar on the opposite bank. We shot across, and thought we had killed him, fur he laid quite still. As we wanted to take some trophy of our victory to camp, we tied our mules and left our guns, clothes, and everything except our knives and belts, and swum over to whar the bar war. But instead of being dead, as we expected, he sprung up as we come near him, and took after us. Then you ought to have seen two naked men run! It war a race for life, and a close one, too. But we made the river first. The bank war about fifteen feet high above the water, and the river ten or twelve feet deep; but we didn't halt. Overboard we went, the bar after us, and in the stream about as quick as we war. The current war very strong, and the bar war about half way between Hawkins and me. Hawkins was trying to swim down stream faster than the current war carrying the bar, and I war a trying to hold back. You can reckon that I swam! Every moment I felt myself being washed into the yawning jaws of the mighty beast, whose head war up the [Pg 92] stream, and his eyes on me. But the current war too strong for him, and swept him along as fast as it did me. All this time, not a long one, we war looking for some place to land where the bar could not overtake us. Hawkins war the first to make the shore, unknown to the bar, whose head war still up stream; and he set up such a whooping and yelling that the bar landed too, but on the opposite side. I made haste to follow Hawkins, who had landed on the side of the river we started from, either by design or good luck: and then we traveled back a mile and more to whar our mules war left—a bar on one side of the river, and *two bares* on the other!"

Notwithstanding that a necessary discipline was observed and maintained in the fur traders' camp, there was at the same time a freedom of manner between the Booshways and the men, both hired and free, which could not obtain in a purely military organization, nor even in the higher walks of civilized life in cities. In the mountain community, motley as it was, as in other communities more refined, were some men who enjoyed almost unlimited freedom of speech and action, and others who were the butt of everybody's ridicule or censure. The leaders themselves did not escape the critical judgment of the men; and the estimation in which they were held could be inferred from the manner in which they designated them. Captain Sublette, whose energy, courage, and kindness entitled him to the admiration of the mountaineers, went by the name of *Billy*: his partner Jackson, was called *Davey*; Bridger, *old Gabe*, and so on. In the same manner the men distinguished favorites or oddities amongst themselves, and to have the adjective *old* prefixed to a man's name signified nothing concerning his age, but rather that he was an object of distinction; though it did not always indicate, except by the tone in which it was pronounced, whether that distinction were an enviable one or not. [Pg 93]

Whenever a trapper could get hold of any sort of story reflecting on the courage of a leader, he was sure at some time to make him aware of it, and these anecdotes were sometimes sharp answers in the mouths of careless camp-keepers. Bridger was once waylaid by Blackfeet, who shot at him, hitting his horse in several places. The wounds caused the animal to rear and pitch, by reason of which violent movements

Bridger dropped his gun, and the Indians snatched it up; after which there was nothing to do except to run, which Bridger accordingly did. Not long after this, as was customary, the leader was making a circuit of the camp examining the camp-keeper's guns, to see if they were in order, and found that of one Maloney, an Irishman, in a very dirty condition.

"What would you do," asked Bridger, "with a gun like that, if the Indians were to charge on the camp?"

"Be ——, I would throw it to them, and run the way ye did," answered Maloney, quickly. It was sometime after this incident before Bridger again examined Maloney's gun.

A laughable story in this way went the rounds of the camp in this fall of 1830. Milton Sublette was out on a hunt with Meek after buffalo, and they were just approaching the band on foot, at a distance apart of about fifty yards, when a large grizzly bear came out of a thicket and made after Sublette, who, when he perceived the creature, ran for the nearest cotton-wood tree. Meek in the meantime, seeing that Sublette was not likely to escape, had taken sure aim, and fired at the bear, fortunately killing him. On running up to the spot where it laid, Sublette was discovered sitting at the foot of a cotton-wood, with his legs and arms clasped tightly around it.

"Do you always climb a tree in that way?" asked Meek. [Pg 94]

"I reckon you took the wrong end of it, that time, Milton!"

"I'll be ——, Meek, if I didn't think I was twenty feet up that tree when you shot;" answered the frightened Booshway; and from that time the men never tired of alluding to Milton's manner of climbing a tree.

THE WRONG END OF THE TREE.

These were some of the mirthful incidents which gave occasion for a gayety which had to be substituted for happiness, in the checkered life of the trapper; and there were like to be many such, where there were two hundred men, each almost daily in the way of adventures by flood or field.

On the change in the management of the Company which occurred at the rendezvous this year, three of the new partners, Fitzpatrick, Sublette, and Bridger, conducted a large party, numbering over two hundred, from the Wind River to the Yellowstone; crossing thence to Smith's River, the Falls of the Missouri, three forks of the Missouri, and to the Big Blackfoot River. The hunt proved very successful; beaver were plentiful; and the Blackfeet shy of so large a traveling party. Although so long in their country, there were only four men killed out of the whole company during this autumn. [Pg 95]

From the Blackfoot River the company proceeded down the west side of the mountains to the forks of the Snake River, and after trapping for a short time in this locality, continued their march southward as far as Ogden's Hole, a small valley among the Bear River Mountains.

At this place they fell in with a trading and trapping party, under Mr. Peter Skeen Ogden, of the Hudson's Bay Company. And now commenced that irritating and reprehensible style of rivalry with which the different companies were accustomed to annoy one another. Accompanying Mr. Ogden's trading party were a party of Rockway Indians, who were from the North, and who were employed by the Hudson's Bay Company, as the Iroquois and Crows were, to trap for them. Fitzpatrick and associates camped in the neighborhood of Ogden's company, and immediately set about endeavoring to purchase from the Rockways and others, the furs collected for Mr. Ogden. Not succeeding by fair means, if the means to such an end could be called fair,—they opened a keg of whiskey, which, when the Indians had got a taste, soon drew them away from the Hudson's Bay trader, the regulations of whose company forbade the selling or giving of liquors to the Indians. Under its influence, the furs were disposed of to the Rocky Mountain Company, who in this manner obtained nearly the whole product of their year's hunt. This course of

conduct was naturally exceedingly disagreeable to Mr. Ogden, as well as unprofitable also; and a feeling of hostility grew up and increased between the two camps.

While matters were in this position, a stampede one day occurred among the horses in Ogden's camp, and two or three of the animals ran away, and ran into the camp of the rival company. Among them was the horse of Mr. Ogden's Indian wife, which had escaped, with her babe hanging to the saddle. [Pg 96]

Not many minutes elapsed, before the mother, following her child and horse, entered the camp, passing right through it, and catching the now halting steed by the bridle. At the same moment she espied one of her company's pack-horses, loaded with beaver, which had also run into the enemy's camp. The men had already begun to exult over the circumstance, considering this chance load of beaver as theirs, by the laws of war. But not so the Indian woman. Mounting her own horse, she fearlessly seized the pack-horse by the halter, and led it out of camp, with its costly burden.

At this undaunted action, some of the baser sort of men cried out "shoot her, shoot her!" but a majority interfered, with opposing cries of "let her go; let her alone; she's a brave woman: I glory in her pluck;" and other like admiring expressions. While the clamor continued, the wife of Ogden had galloped away, with her baby and her pack-horse.

As the season advanced, Fitzpatrick, with his other partners, returned to the east side of the mountains, and went into winter quarters on Powder river. In this trapper's "land of Canaan" they remained between two and three months. The other two partners, Frapp and Jervais, who were trapping far to the south, did not return until the following year.

While wintering it became necessary to send a dispatch to St. Louis on the company's business. Meek and a Frenchman named Legarde, were chosen for this service, which was one of trust and peril also. They proceeded without accident, however, until the Pawnee villages were reached, when Legarde was taken prisoner. Meek, more cautious, escaped, and proceeded alone a few days' travel beyond, when he fell in with an express on its way to St. Louis, to whom he delivered his dispatches, and returned to camp, accompanied only by a Frenchman named Cabeneau; thus proving himself an efficient mountaineer at twenty years of age. [Pg 97]

1831. As soon as the spring opened, sometime in March, the whole company started north again, for the Blackfoot country. But on the night of the third day out, they fell unawares into the neighborhood of a party of Crow Indians, whose spies discovered the company's horses feeding on the dry grass of a little bottom, and succeeded in driving off about three hundred head. Here was a dilemma to be in, in the heart of an enemy's country! To send the remaining horses after these, might be "sending the axe after the helve;" besides most of them belonged to the free trappers, and could not be pressed into the service.

The only course remaining was to select the best men and dispatch them on foot, to overtake and retake the stolen horses. Accordingly one hundred trappers were ordered on this expedition, among whom were Meek, Newell, and Antoine Godin, a half-breed and brave fellow, who was to lead the party. Following the trail of the Crows for two hundred miles, traveling day and night, on the third day they came up with them on a branch of the Bighorn river. The trappers advanced cautiously, and being on the opposite side of the stream, on a wooded bluff, were enabled to approach close enough to look into their fort, and count the unsuspecting thieves. There were sixty of them, fine young braves, who believed that now they had made a start in life. Alas, for the vanity of human, and especially of Crow expectations! Even then, while they were grouped around their fires, congratulating themselves on the sudden wealth which had descended upon them, as it were from the skies, an envious fate, in the shape of several roguish white trappers, was laughing at them and their hopes, from the overhanging bluff opposite them. And by and by, when they were wrapped in a satisfied slumber, two of these laughing rogues, Robert Newell, and Antoine Godin, stole under the very walls of their fort, and setting the horses free, drove them across the creek. [Pg 98]

The Indians were awakened by the noise of the trampling horses, and sprang to arms. But Meek and his fellow-trappers on the bluff fired into the fort with such effect that the Crows were appalled. Having delivered their first volley, they did not wait for the savages to recover from their recoil. Mounting in hot haste, the cavalcade of bare-back riders, and their drove of horses, were soon far away from the Crow fort, leaving the ambitious braves to finish their excursion on foot. It was afterwards ascertained that the Crows lost seven men by that one volley of the trappers.

Flushed with success, the trappers yet found the backward journey more toilsome than the outward; for what with sleeplessness and fatigue, and bad traveling in melted snow, they were pretty well exhausted when they reached camp. Fearing, however, another raid from the thieving Crows, the camp got in motion again with as

little delay as possible. They had not gone far, when Fitzpatrick turned back, with only one man, to go to St. Louis for supplies.

After the departure of Fitzpatrick, Bridger and Sublette completed their spring and summer campaign without any material loss in men or animals, and with considerable gain in beaver skins. Having once more visited the Yellowstone, they turned to the south again, crossing the mountains into Pierre's Hole, on to Snake river; thence to Salt river; thence to Bear river; and thence to Green river, to rendezvous. [Pg 99]

It was expected that Fitzpatrick would have arrived from St. Louis with the usual annual recruits and supplies of merchandise, in time for the summer rendezvous; but after waiting for some time in vain, Bridger and Sublette determined to send out a small party to look for him. The large number of men now employed, had exhausted the stock of goods on hand. The camp was without blankets and without ammunition; knives were not to be had; traps were scarce; but worse than all, the tobacco had given out, and alcohol was not! In such a case as this, what could a mountain-man do?

To seek the missing Booshway became not only a duty, but a necessity; and not only a necessity of the physical man, but in an equal degree a need of the moral and spiritual man, which was rusting with the tedium of waiting. In the state of uncertainty in which the minds of the company were involved, it occurred to that of Frapp to consult a great "medicine-man" of the Crows, one of those recruits filched from Mr. Ogden's party by whiskey the previous year.

Like all eminent professional men, the Crow chief required a generous fee, of the value of a horse or two, before he would begin to make "medicine." This peculiar ceremony is pretty much alike among all the different tribes. It is observed first in the making of a medicine man, *i. e.*, qualifying him for his profession; and afterwards is practiced to enable him to heal the sick, to prophecy, and to dream dreams, or even to give victory to his people. To a medicine-man was imputed great power, not only to cure, but to kill; and if, as it sometimes happened, the relatives of a sick man suspected the medicine-man of having caused his death, by the exercise of evil powers, one of them, or all of them, pursued him to the death. Therefore, although it might be honorable, it was not always safe to be a great "medicine." [Pg 100]

The Indians placed a sort of religious value upon the practice of fasting; a somewhat curious fact, when it is remembered how many compulsory fasts they are obliged to endure, which must train them to think lightly of the deprivation of food. Those, however, who could endure voluntary abstinence long enough, were enabled to become very wise and very brave. The manner of making a "medicine" among some of the interior tribes, is in certain respects similar to the practice gone through with by some preachers, in making a convert. A sort of camp-meeting is held, for several nights, generally about five, during which various dances are performed, with cries, and incantations, bodily exercises, singing, and nervous excitement; enough to make many patients, instead of one doctor. But the native's constitution is a strong one, and he holds out well. At last, however, one or more are overcome with the mysterious *power* which enters into them at that time; making, instead of a saint, only a superstitious Indian doctor.

The same sort of exercises which had made the Cree man a doctor were now resorted to, in order that he might obtain a more than natural sight, enabling him to see visions of the air, or at the least to endow him with prophetic dreams. After several nights of singing, dancing, hopping, screeching, beating of drums, and other more violent exercises and contortions, the exhausted medicine-man fell off to sleep, and when he awoke he announced to Frapp that Fitzpatrick was not dead. He was on the road; some road; but not the right one; etc., etc.

Thus encouraged, Frapp determined to take a party, and go in search of him. Accordingly Meek, Reese, Ebarts, and Nelson, volunteered to accompany him. This party set out, first in the direction of Wind River; but not discovering any signs of the lost Booshway in that quarter, crossed over to the Sweetwater, and kept along down to the North Fork of the Platte, and thence to the Black Hills, where they found a beautiful country full of game; but not the hoped-for train, with supplies. After waiting for a short time at the Black Hills, Frapp's party returned to the North Fork of the Platte, and were rejoiced to meet at last, the long absent partner, with his pack train. Urged by Frapp, Fitzpatrick hastened forward, and came into camp on Powder River after winter had set in. [Pg 101]

Fitzpatrick had a tale to tell the other partners, in explanation of his unexpected delay. When he had started for St. Louis in the month of March previous, he had hoped to have met the old partners, Capt. Sublette and Jedediah Smith, and to have obtained the necessary supplies from them, to furnish the Summer rendezvous with plenty. But these gentlemen, when he fell in with them, used certain arguments which induced him to turn back, and accompany them to Santa Fe, where they promised to furnish him goods, as he desired, and to procure for him an escort at that place. The journey had proven tedious, and unfortunate. They had several times

been attacked by Indians, and Smith had been killed. While they were camped on a small tributary of the Simmaron River, Smith had gone a short distance from camp to procure water, and while at the stream was surprised by an ambush, and murdered on the spot, his murderers escaping unpunished. Sublette, now left alone in the business, finally furnished him; and he had at last made his way back to his Rocky Mountain camp.

But Fitzpatrick's content at being once more with his company was poisoned by the disagreeable proximity of a rival company. If he had annoyed Mr. Ogden of the [Pg 102] Hudson's Bay Company, in the previous autumn, Major Vanderburg and Mr. Dripps, of the American Company, in their turn annoyed him. This company had been on their heels, from the Platte River, and now were camped in the same neighborhood, using the Rocky Mountain Company as pilots to show them the country. As this was just what it was not for their interest to do, the Rocky Mountain Company raised camp, and fairly ran away from them; crossing the mountains to the Forks of the Snake River, where they wintered among the Nez Perces and Flathead Indians.

Some time during this winter, Meek and Legarde, who had escaped from the Pawnees, made another expedition together; traveling three hundred miles on snowshoes, to the Bitter Root River, to look for a party of free trappers, whose beaver the company wished to secure. They were absent two months and a half, on this errand, and were entirely successful, passing a Blackfoot village in the night, but having no adventures worth recounting.

CHAPTER VI.

1832. In the following spring, the Rocky Mountain Fur Company commenced its march, first up Lewis' Fork, then on to Salt River, thence to Gray's River, and thence to Bear River. They fell in with the North American Fur Company on the latter river, with a large lot of goods, but no beaver. The American Company's resident partners were ignorant of the country, and were greatly at a loss where to look for the good trapping grounds. These gentlemen, Vanderburg and Dripps, were therefore inclined to keep an eye on the movements of the Rocky Mountain Company, whose leaders were acquainted with the whole region lying along the mountains, from the head-waters of the Colorado to the northern branches of the Missouri. On the other hand, the Rocky Mountain Company were anxious to "shake the dust from off their feet," which was trodden by the American Company, and to avoid the evils of competition in an Indian country. But they found the effort quite useless; the rival company had a habit of turning up in the most unexpected places, and taking advantage of the hard-earned experience of the Rocky Mountain Company's leaders. They tampered with the trappers, and ferreted out the secret of their next rendezvous; they followed on their trail, making them pilots to the trapping grounds; they sold goods to the Indians, and what was worse, to the hired trappers. In this way grew up that fierce conflict of interests, which made it "as much as his life was worth" for a trapper to suffer himself to be inveigled into the service of a rival company, which about this [Pg 104] time or a little later, was at its highest, and which finally ruined the fur-trade for the American companies in the Rocky Mountains.

Finding their rivals in possession of the ground, Bridger and Milton Sublette resolved to spend but a few days in that country. But so far as Sublette was concerned, circumstances ordered differently. A Rockway Chief, named Gray, and seven of his people, had accompanied the camp from Ogden's Hole, in the capacity of trappers. But during the sojourn on Bear River, there was a quarrel in camp on account of some indignity, real or fancied, which had been offered to the chief's daughter, and in the affray Gray stabbed Sublette so severely that it was thought he must die.

It thus fell out that Sublette had to be left behind; and Meek who was his favorite, was left to take care of him while he lived, and bury him if he died; which trouble Sublette saved him, however, by getting well. But they had forty lonesome days to themselves after the camps had moved off,—one on the heels of the other, to the great vexation of Bridger. Time passed slowly in Sublette's lodge, while waiting for his wound to heal. Day passed after day, so entirely like each other that the monotony alone seemed sufficient to invite death to an easy conquest. But the mountain-man's blood, like the Indians, is strong and pure, and his flesh heals readily, therefore, since death would not have him, the wounded man was forced to accept of life in just this monotonous form. To him Joe Meek was everything,—hands, feet, physician, guard, caterer, hunter, cook, companion, friend. What long talks they had, when Sublette grew better: what stories they told; what little glimpses of a secret chamber in their hearts, and a better than the every-day spirit, in their [Pg 105] bosoms, was revealed,—as men will reveal such things in the isolation of sea-voyages, or the solitary presence of majestic Nature.

To the veteran mountaineer there must have been something soothing in the care and friendship of the youth of twenty-two, with his daring disposition, his frankness,

his cheerful humor, and his good looks;—for our Joe was growing to be a maturely handsome man—tall, broad-shouldered, straight, with plenty of flesh, and none too much of it; a Southerner's olive complexion; frank, dark eyes, and a classical nose and chin. What though in the matter of dress he was ignorant of the latest styles?—grace imparts elegance even to the trapper's beaver-skin cap and blanket capote.

At the end of forty days, as many as it took to drown a world, Sublette found himself well enough to ride; and the two set out on their search for camp. But now other adventures awaited them. On a fork of Green River, they came suddenly upon a band of Snake Indians feeding their horses. As soon as the Snakes discovered the white men, they set up a yell, and made an instinctive rush for their horses. Now was the critical moment. One word passed between the travelers, and they made a dash past the savages, right into the village, and never slacked rein until they threw themselves from their horses at the door of the Medicine lodge. This is a large and fancifully decorated lodge, which stands in the centre of a village, and like the churches of Christians, is sacred. Once inside of this, the strangers were safe for the present; their blood could not be shed there.

The warriors of the village soon followed Sublette and Meek into their strange house of refuge. In half an hour it was filled. Not a word was addressed to the strangers; nor by them to the Indians, who talked among themselves with a solemn eagerness, [Pg 106] while they smoked the medicine pipe, as inspiration in their councils. Great was the excitement in the minds of the listeners, who understood the Snake tongue, as the question of their life or death was gravely discussed; yet in their countenances appeared only the utmost serenity. To show fear, is to whet an Indian's appetite for blood: coolness confounds and awes him when anything will.

If Sublette had longed for excitement, while an invalid in his lonely lodge on Bear River, he longed equally now for that blissful seclusion. Listening for, and hearing one's death-warrant from a band of blood-thirsty savages, could only prove with bitter sharpness how sweet was life, even the most uneventful. For hours the council continued, and the majority favored the death-sentence. But one old chief, called the good *Gotia*, argued long for an acquittal: he did not see the necessity of murdering two harmless travelers of the white race. Nothing availed, however, and just at sunset their doom was fixed.

The only hope of escape was, that, favored by darkness, they might elude the vigilance of their jailers; and night, although so near, seemed ages away, even at sundown. Death being decreed, the warriors left the lodge one by one to attend to the preparation of the preliminary ceremonies. Gotia, the good, was the last to depart. As he left the Medicine lodge he made signs to the captives to remain quiet until he should return; pointing upwards to signify that there was a chance of life; and downwards to show that possibly they must die.

What an age of anxiety was that hour of waiting! Not a word had been exchanged between the prisoners since the Indians entered the lodge, until now; and now very little was said, for speech would draw upon them the vigilance of their enemy, by whom they desired most ardently to be forgotten. [Pg 107]

About dusk there was a great noise, and confusion, and clouds of dust, in the south end of the village. Something was going wrong among the Indian horses. Immediately all the village ran to the scene of the disorder, and at the same moment Gotia, the good, appeared at the door of the Medicine lodge, beckoning the prisoners to follow him. With alacrity they sprang up and after him, and were led across the stream, to a thicket on the opposite side, where their horses stood, ready to mount, in the charge of a young Indian girl. They did not stop for compliments, though had time been less precious, they might well have bestowed some moments of it in admiration of *Umentucken Tukutsey Undewatsey*, the Mountain Lamb. Soon after, the beautiful Snake girl became the wife of Milton Sublette; and after his return to the States, of the subject of this narrative; from which circumstance the incident above related takes on something of the rosy hue of romance.

As each released captive received his bridle from the delicate hand of the Mountain Lamb, he sprang to the saddle. By this time the chief had discovered that the strangers understood the Snake dialect. "Ride, if you wish to live," said he: "ride without stopping, all night: and to-morrow linger not." With hurried thanks our mountain-men replied to this advice, and striking into a gallop, were soon far away from the Snake village. The next day at noon found them a hundred and fifty miles on their way to camp. Proceeding without further accident, they crossed the Teton Mountains, and joined the company at Pierre's Hole, after an absence of nearly four months.

Here they found the ubiquitous if not omnipresent American Fur Company encamped at the rendezvous of the Rocky Mountain Company. The partners being anxious to be [Pg 108] freed from this sort of espionage, and obstinate competition on their own ground, made a proposition to Vanderburg and Dripps to divide the country with them, each company to keep on its own territory. This proposition was refused by the American Company; perhaps because they feared having the poorer portion set off to

themselves by their more experienced rivals. On this refusal, the Rocky Mountain Company determined to send an express to meet Capt. William Sublette, who was on his way out with a heavy stock of merchandise, and hurry him forward, lest the American Company should have the opportunity of disposing of its goods, when the usual gathering to rendezvous began. On this decision being formed, Fitzpatrick determined to go on this errand himself; which he accordingly did, falling in with Sublette, and Campbell, his associate, somewhere near the Black Hills. To them he imparted his wishes and designs, and receiving the assurance of an early arrival at rendezvous, parted from them at the Sweetwater, and hastened back, alone, as he came, to prepare for business.

Captain Sublette hurried forward with his train, which consisted of sixty men with pack-horses, three to a man. In company with him, was Mr. Nathaniel Wyeth, a history of whose fur-trading and salmon-fishing adventures has already been given. Captain Sublette had fallen in with Mr. Wyeth at Independence, Missouri; and finding him ignorant of the undertaking on which he was launched, offered to become pilot and traveling companion, an offer which was gratefully accepted.

The caravan had reached the foot-hills of the Wind River Mountains, when the raw recruits belonging to both these parties were treated to a slight foretaste of what Indian fighting would be, should they ever have to encounter it. Their camp was suddenly aroused at midnight by the simultaneous discharge of guns and arrows, and [Pg 109] the frightful whoops and yells with which the savages make an attack. Nobody was wounded, however; but on springing to arms, the Indians fled, taking with them a few horses which their yells had frightened from their pickets. These marauders were Blackfeet, as Captain Sublette explained to Mr. Wyeth, their moccasin tracks having betrayed them; for as each tribe has a peculiar way of making or shaping the moccasin, the expert in Indian habits can detect the nationality of an Indian thief by his foot-print. After this episode of the night assault, the leaders redoubled their watchfulness, and reached their destination in Pierre's hole about the first of July.

When Sublette arrived in camp, it was found that Fitzpatrick was missing. If the other partners had believed him to be with the Captain, the Captain expected to find him with them; but since neither could account to the other for his non-appearance, much anxiety was felt, and Sublette remembered with apprehension the visit he had received from Blackfeet. However, before anything had been determined upon with regard to him, he made his appearance in camp, in company with two Iroquois half-breeds, belonging to the camp, who had been out on a hunt.

Fitzpatrick had met with an adventure, as had been conjectured. While coming up the Green river valley, he descried a small party of mounted men, whom he mistook for a company of trappers, and stopped to reconnoitre; but almost at the same moment the supposed trappers, perceiving him, set up a yell that quickly undeceived him, and compelled him to flight. Abandoning his pack-horse, he put the other to its topmost speed, and succeeded in gaining the mountains, where in a deep and dark defile he secreted himself until he judged the Indians had left that part of the valley. [Pg 110] In this he was deceived, for no sooner did he emerge again into the open country, than he was once more pursued, and had to abandon his horse, to take refuge among the cliffs of the mountains. Here he remained for several days, without blankets or provisions, and with only one charge of ammunition, which was in his rifle, and kept for self-defense. At length, however, by frequent reconnoitering, he managed to elude his enemies, traveling by night, until he fortunately met with the two hunters from camp, and was conveyed by them to the rendezvous.

All the parties were now safely in. The lonely mountain valley was populous with the different camps. The Rocky Mountain and American companies had their separate camps; Wyeth had his; a company of free trappers, fifteen in number, led by a man named Sinclair, from Arkansas, had the fourth; the Nez Perces and Flatheads, the allies of the Rocky Mountain company, and the friends of the whites, had their lodges along all the streams; so that altogether there could not have been less than one thousand souls, and two or three thousand horses and mules gathered in this place.

"When the pie was opened then the birds began to sing." When Captain Sublette's goods were opened and distributed among the trappers and Indians, then began the usual gay carousal; and the "fast young men" of the mountains outvied each other in all manner of mad pranks. In the beginning of their spree many feats of horsemanship and personal strength were exhibited, which were regarded with admiring wonder by the sober and inexperienced New Englanders under Mr. Wyeth's command. And as nothing stimulated the vanity of the mountain-men like an audience of this sort, the feats they performed were apt to astonish themselves. In exhibitions of the kind, the free trappers took the lead, and usually carried off the [Pg 111] palm, like the privileged class that they were.

But the horse-racing, fine riding, wrestling, and all the manlier sports, soon degenerated into the baser exhibitions of a "crazy drunk" condition. The vessel in which the trapper received and carried about his supply of alcohol was one of the small camp kettles. "Passing round" this clumsy goblet very freely, it was not long

before a goodly number were in the condition just named, and ready for any mad freak whatever. It is reported by several of the mountain-men that on the occasion of one of these "frolics," one of their number seized a kettle of alcohol, and poured it over the head of a tall, lank, redheaded fellow, repeating as he did so the baptismal ceremony. No sooner had he concluded, than another man with a lighted stick, touched him with the blaze, when in an instant he was enveloped in flames. Luckily some of the company had sense enough left to perceive his danger, and began beating him with pack-saddles to put out the blaze. But between the burning and the beating, the unhappy wretch nearly lost his life, and never recovered from the effects of his baptism by fire.

Beaver being plenty in camp, business was correspondingly lively, there being a great demand for goods. When this demand was supplied, as it was in the course of about three weeks, the different brigades were set in motion. One of the earliest to move was a small party under Milton Sublette, including his constant companion, Meek. With this company, no more than thirty in number, Sublette intended to explore the country to the south-west, then unknown to the fur companies, and to proceed as far as the Humboldt river in that direction.

On the 17th of July they set out toward the south end of the valley, and having made but about eight miles the first day, camped that night near a pass in the mountains. [Pg 112] Wyeth's party of raw New Englanders, and Sinclair's free trappers, had joined themselves to the company of Milton Sublette, and swelled the number in camp to about sixty men, many of them new to the business of mountain life.

Just as the men were raising camp for a start the next morning, a caravan was observed moving down the mountain pass into the valley. No alarm was at first felt, as an arrival was daily expected of one of the American company's partisans, Mr. Fontenelle, and his company. But on reconnoitering with a glass, Sublette discovered them to be a large party of Blackfeet, consisting of a few mounted men, and many more, men, women, and children, on foot. At the instant they were discovered, they set up the usual yell of defiance, and rushed down like a mountain torrent into the valley, flourishing their weapons, and fluttering their gay blankets and feathers in the wind. There was no doubt as to the warlike intentions of the Blackfeet in general, nor was it for a moment to be supposed that any peaceable overture on their part meant anything more than that they were not prepared to fight at that particular juncture; therefore let not the reader judge too harshly of an act which under ordinary circumstances would have been infamous. In Indian fighting, every man is his own leader, and the bravest take the front rank. On this occasion there were two of Sublette's men, one a half-breed Iroquois, the other a Flathead Indian, who had wrongs of their own to avenge, and they never let slip a chance of killing a Blackfoot. These two men rode forth alone to meet the enemy, as if to hold a "talk" with the principal chief, who advanced to meet them, bearing the pipe of peace. When the chief extended his hand, Antonio Godin, the half-breed, took it, but at the same [Pg 113] moment he ordered the Flathead to fire, and the chief fell dead. The two trappers galloped back to camp, Antoine bearing for a trophy the scarlet blanket of his enemy.

This action made it impossible to postpone the battle, as the dead chief had meant to do by peaceful overtures, until the warriors of his nation came up. The Blackfeet immediately betook themselves to a swamp formed by an old beaver dam, and thickly overgrown with cotton-wood and willow, matted together with tough vines. On the edge of this dismal covert the warriors skulked, and shot with their guns and arrows, while in its very midst the women employed themselves in digging a trench and throwing up a breastwork of logs, and whatever came to hand. Such a defence as the thicket afforded was one not easy to attack; its unseen but certain dangers being sufficient to appal the stoutest heart.

Meantime, an express had been sent off to inform Captain Sublette of the battle, and summon assistance. Sinclair and his free trappers, with Milton Sublette's small company, were the only fighting men at hand. Mr. Wyeth, knowing the inefficiency of his men in an Indian fight, had them entrenched behind their packs, and there left them to take care of themselves, but charged them not to appear in open field. As for the fighting men, they stationed themselves in a ravine, where they could occasionally pick off a Blackfoot, and waited for reinforcements.

Great was the astonishment of the Blackfeet, who believed they had only Milton Sublette's camp to fight, when they beheld first one party of white men and then another; and not only whites, but Nez Perces and Flatheads came galloping up the valley. If before it had been a battle to destroy the whites, it was now a battle to defend themselves. Previous to the arrival of Captain Sublette, the opposing forces [Pg 114] had kept up only a scattering fire, in which nobody on the side of the trappers had been either killed or wounded. But when the impetuous captain arrived on the battle-field, he prepared for less guarded warfare. Stripped as if for the prize-ring, and armed *cap-a-pie*, he hastened to the scene of action, accompanied by his intimate friend and associate in business, Robert Campbell.

At sight of the reinforcements, and their vigorous movements, the Indians at the

edge of the swamp fell back within their fort. To dislodge them was a dangerous undertaking, but Captain Sublette was determined to make the effort. Finding the trappers generally disinclined to enter the thicket, he set the example, together with Campbell, and thus induced some of the free trappers, with their leader, Sinclair, to emulate his action. However, the others took courage at this, and advanced near the swamp, firing at random at their invisible foe, who, having the advantage of being able to see them, inflicted some wounds on the party.

The few white "braves" who had resolved to enter the swamp, made their wills as they went, feeling that they were upon perilous business. Sublette, Campbell, and Sinclair succeeded in penetrating the thicket without alarming the enemy, and came at length to a more open space from whence they could get a view of the fort. From this they learned that the women and children had retired to the mountains, and that the fort was a slight affair, covered with buffalo robes and blankets to keep out prying eyes. Moving slowly on, some slight accident betrayed their vicinity, and the next moment a shot struck Sinclair, wounding him mortally. He spoke to Campbell, requesting to be taken to his brother. By this time some of the men had come up, and he was given in charge to be taken back to camp. Sublette then pressed forward, and [Pg 115] seeing an Indian looking through an aperture, aimed at him with fatal effect. No sooner had he done so, and pointed out the opening to Campbell, than he was struck with a ball in the shoulder, which nearly prostrated him, and turned him so faint that Campbell took him in his arms and carried him, assisted by Meek, out of the swamp. At the same time one of the men received a wound in the head. The battle was now carried on with spirit, although from the difficulty of approaching the fort, the firing was very irregular.

The mountaineers who followed Sublette, took up their station in the woods on one side of the fort, and the Nez Perces, under Wyeth, on the opposite side, which accidental arrangement, though it was fatal to many of the Blackfeet in the fort, was also the occasion of loss to themselves by the cross-fire. The whites being constantly reinforced by fresh arrivals from the rendezvous, were soon able to silence the guns of the enemy, but they were not able to drive them from their fort, where they remained silent and sullen after their ammunition was exhausted.

Seeing that the women of the Nez Perces and Flatheads were gathering up sticks to set fire to their breastwork of logs, an old chief proclaimed in a loud voice from within, the startling intelligence that there were four hundred lodges of his people close at hand, who would soon be there to avenge their deaths, should the whites choose to reduce them to ashes. This harangue, delivered in the usual high-flown style of Indian oratory, either was not clearly understood, or was wrongly interpreted, and the impression got abroad that an attack was being made on the great encampment. This intelligence occasioned a diversion, and a division of forces; for while a small party was left to watch the fort, the rest galloped in hot haste to the [Pg 116] rescue of the main camp. When they arrived, they found it had been a false alarm, but it was too late to return that night, and the several camps remained where they were until the next day.

Meantime the trappers left to guard the fort remained stationed within the wood all night, firmly believing they had their enemy "corraled," as the horsemen of the plains would say. On the return, in the morning, of their comrades from the main camp, they advanced cautiously up to the breastwork of logs, and behold! not a buffalo skin nor red blanket was to be seen! Through the crevices among the logs was seen an empty fort. On making this discovery there was much chagrin among the white trappers, and much lamentation among the Indian allies, who had abandoned the burning of the fort expressly to save for themselves the fine blankets and other goods of their hereditary foes.

From the reluctance displayed by the trappers, in the beginning of the battle, to engage with the Indians while under cover of the woods, it must not be inferred that they were lacking in courage. They were too well informed in Indian modes of warfare to venture recklessly into the den of death, which a savage ambush was quite sure to be. The very result which attended the impetuosity of their leaders, in the death of Sinclair and the wounding of Captain Sublette, proved them not over cautious.

On entering the fort, the dead bodies of ten Blackfeet were found, besides others dead outside the fort, and over thirty horses, some of which were recognized as those stolen from Sublette's night camp on the other side of the mountains, besides those abandoned by Fitzpatrick. Doubtless the rascals had followed his trail to Pierre's [Pg 117] Hole, not thinking, however, to come upon so large a camp as they found at last. The savage garrison which had so cunningly contrived to elude the guard set upon them, carried off some of their wounded, and, perhaps, also some of their dead; for they acknowledged afterwards a much larger loss than appeared at the time. Besides Sinclair, there were five other white men killed, one half-breed, and seven Nez Perces. About the same number of whites and their Indian allies were wounded.

An instance of female devotion is recorded by Bonneville's historian as having

occurred at this battle. On the morning following it, as the whites were exploring the thickets about the fort, they discovered a Blackfoot woman leaning silent and motionless against a tree. According to Mr. Irving, whose fine feeling for the sex would incline him to put faith in this bit of romance, "their surprise at her lingering here alone, to fall into the hands of her enemies, was dispelled when they saw the corpse of a warrior at her feet. Either she was so lost in grief as not to perceive their approach, or a proud spirit kept her silent and motionless. The Indians set up a yell on discovering her, and before the trappers could interfere, her mangled body fell upon the corpse which she had refused to abandon." This version is true in the main incidents, but untrue in the sentiment. The woman's leg had been broken by a ball, and she was unable to move from the spot where she leaned. When the trappers approached her, she stretched out her hands supplicatingly, crying out in a wailing voice, "kill me! kill me! O white men, kill me!"—but this the trappers had no disposition to do. While she was entreating them, and they refusing, a ball from some vengeful Nez Perce or Flathead put an end to her sufferings.

Still remembering the threats of the Blackfoot chief, that four hundred lodges of his brethren were advancing on the valley, all the companies returned to rendezvous, and remained for several days, to see whether an attack should take place. But if there had ever been any such intention on the part of the Blackfoot nation, the timely lesson bestowed on their advance guard had warned them to quit the neighborhood of the whites. [Pg 118]

Captain Sublette's wound was dressed by Mr. Wyeth's physician, and although it hindered his departure for St. Louis for some time, it did not prevent his making his usual journey later in the season. It was as well, perhaps, that he did not set out earlier, for of a party of seven who started for St. Louis a few days after the battle, three were killed in Jackson's Hole, where they fell in with the four hundred warriors with whom the Blackfoot chief threatened the whites at the battle of Pierre's Hole. From the story of the four survivors who escaped and returned to camp, there could no longer be any doubt that the big village of the Blackfeet had actually been upon the trail of Capt. Sublette, expecting an easy victory when they should overtake him. How they were disappointed by the reception met with by the advance camp, has already been related.

CHAPTER VII.

1832. On the 23d of July, Milton Sublette's brigade and the company of Mr. Wyeth again set out for the southwest, and met no more serious interruptions while they traveled in company. On the head-waters of the Humboldt River they separated, Wyeth proceeding north to the Columbia, and Sublette continuing on into a country hitherto untraversed by American trappers.

It was the custom of a camp on the move to depend chiefly on the men employed as hunters to supply them with game, the sole support of the mountaineers. When this failed, the stock on hand was soon exhausted, and the men reduced to famine. This was what happened to Sublette's company in the country where they now found themselves, between the Owyhee and Humboldt Rivers. Owing to the arid and barren nature of these plains, the largest game to be found was the beaver, whose flesh proved to be poisonous, from the creature having eaten of the wild parsnip in the absence of its favorite food. The men were made ill by eating of beaver flesh, and the horses were greatly reduced from the scarcity of grass and the entire absence of the cotton-wood.

In this plight Sublette found himself, and finally resolved to turn north, in the hope of coming upon some better and more hospitable country. The sufferings of the men now became terrible, both from hunger and thirst. In the effort to appease the former, everything was eaten that could be eaten, and many things at which the well-fed man would sicken with disgust. "I have," says Joe Meek, "held my hands in an ant-hill until they were covered with the ants, then greedily licked them off. I have taken the soles off my moccasins, crisped them in the fire, and eaten them. In our extremity, the large black crickets which are found in this country were considered game. We used to take a kettle of hot water, catch the crickets and throw them in, and when they stopped kicking, eat them. That was not what we called *cant tickup ko hanch*, (good meat, my friend), but it kept us alive." [Pg 120]

Equally abhorrent expedients were resorted to in order to quench thirst, some of which would not bear mention. In this condition, and exposed to the burning suns and the dry air of the desert, the men now so nearly exhausted began to prey upon their almost equally exhausted animals. At night when they made their camp, by mutual consent a mule was bled, and a soup made from its blood. About a pint was usually taken, when two or three would mess together upon this reviving, but scanty and not very palatable dish. But this mode of subsistence could not be long depended on, as the poor mules could ill afford to lose blood in their famishing state; nor could

the men afford to lose their mules where there was a chance of life: therefore hungry as they were, the men were cautious in this matter; and it generally caused a quarrel when a man's mule was selected for bleeding by the others.

A few times a mule had been sacrificed to obtain meat; and in this case the poorest one was always selected, so as to economise the chances for life for the whole band. In this extremity, after four days of almost total abstinence and several weeks of famine, the company reached the Snake River, about fifty miles above the fishing falls, where it boils and dashes over the rocks, forming very strong rapids. Here the [Pg 121] company camped, rejoiced at the sight of the pure mountain water, but still in want of food. During the march a horse's back had become sore from some cause; probably, his rider thought, because the saddle did not set well; and, although that particular animal was selected to be sacrificed on the morrow, as one that could best be spared, he set about taking the stuffing out of his saddle and re-arranging the padding. While engaged in this considerate labor, he uttered a cry of delight and held up to view a large brass pin, which had accidentally got into the stuffing, when the saddle was made, and had been the cause of all the mischief to his horse.

The same thought struck all who saw the pin: it was soon converted into a fish-hook, a line was spun from horse-hair, and in a short time there were trout enough caught to furnish them a hearty and a most delicious repast. "In the morning," says Meek, "we went on our way rejoicing;" each man with the "five fishes" tied to his saddle, if without any "loaves." This was the end of their severest suffering, as they had now reached a country where absolute starvation was not the normal condition of the inhabitants; and which was growing more and more bountiful, as they neared the Rocky Mountains, where they at length joined camp, not having made a very profitable expedition.

It may seem incredible to the reader that any country so poor as that in which our trappers starved could have native inhabitants. Yet such was the fact; and the people who lived in and who still inhabit this barren waste, were called *Diggers*, from their mode of obtaining their food—a few edible roots growing in low grounds, or marshy places. When these fail them they subsist as did our trappers, by hunting crickets and field mice.

Nothing can be more abject than the appearance of the Digger Indian, in the fall, as he roams about, without food and without weapons, save perhaps a bow and arrows, [Pg 122] with his eyes fixed upon the ground, looking for crickets! So despicable is he, that he has neither enemies nor friends; and the neighboring tribes do not condescend to notice his existence, unless indeed he should come in their way, when they would not think it more than a mirthful act to put an end to his miserable existence. And so it must be confessed the trappers regarded him. When Sublette's party first struck the Humboldt, Wyeth's being still with them, Joe Meek one day shot a Digger who was prowling about a stream where his traps were set.

"Why did you shoot him?" asked Wyeth.

"To keep him from stealing traps."

"Had he stolen any?"

"No: but he *looked as if he was going to*!"

This recklessness of life very properly distressed the just minded New Englander. Yet it was hard for the trappers to draw lines of distinction so nice as his. If a tribe was not known to be friendly, it was a rule of necessity to consider it unfriendly. The abjectness and cowardice of the Diggers was the fruit of their own helpless condition. That they had the savage instinct, held in check only by circumstances, was demonstrated about the same time that Meek shot one, by his being pursued by four of them when out trapping alone, and only escaping at last by the assistance of one of his comrades who came to the rescue. They could not fight, like the Crows and Blackfeet, but they could steal and murder, when they had a safe opportunity.

It would be an interesting study, no doubt, to the philanthropist, to ascertain in how great a degree the habits, manners, and morals of a people are governed by their resources, especially by the quality and quantity of their diet. But when diet and [Pg 123] climate are both taken into consideration, the result is striking.

The character of the Blackfeet who inhabited the good hunting grounds on the eastern side of the Rocky Mountains, is already pretty well given. They were tall, sinewy, well-made fellows; good horsemen, and good fighters, though inclined to marauding and murdering. They dressed comfortably and even handsomely, as dress goes amongst savages, and altogether were more to be feared than despised.

The Crows resembled the Blackfeet, whose enemies they were, in all the before-mentioned traits, but were if possible, even more predatory in their habits. Unlike the Blackfeet, however, they were not the enemies of all mankind; and even were disposed to cultivate some friendliness with the white traders and trappers, in order, as they acknowledged, to strengthen their own hands against the Blackfeet. They too

inhabited a good country, full of game, and had horses in abundance. These were the mountain tribes.

Comparing these with the coast tribes, there was a striking difference. The natives of the Columbia were not a tall and robust people, like those east of the Rocky Mountains, who lived by hunting. Their height rarely exceeded five feet six inches; their forms were good, rather inclining to fatness, their faces round, features coarse, but complexion light, and their eyes large and intelligent. The custom of flattening their heads in infancy gave them a grotesque and unnatural appearance, otherwise they could not be called ill-looking. On the first advent of white men among them, they were accustomed to go entirely naked, except in winter, when a panther skin, or a mantle of other skins sewed together, served to protect them from the cold: or if the weather was rainy, as it generally was in that milder climate, a long mantle of rush mats, like the toga of the ancient Romans, took the place of that made of skins. [Pg 124] To this was added a conical hat, woven of fibrous roots, and gaily painted.

For defensive armor they were provided with a tunic of elkskin double, descending to the ankles, with holes in it for the arms, and quite impenetrable to arrows. A helmet of similar material covered the head, rendering them like Achilles, invulnerable except in the heels. In this secure dress they went to battle in their canoes, notice being first given to the enemy of the intended attack. Their battles might therefore be termed compound duels, in which each party observed great punctiliousness and decorum. Painted and armor-encased, the warriors in two flotillas of canoes were rowed to the battle ground by their women, when the battle raged furiously for some time; not, however, doing any great harm to either side. If any one chanced to be killed, that side considered itself beaten, and retired from the conflict to mourn over and bury the estimable and departed brave. If the case was a stubborn one, requiring several days fighting, the opponents encamped near each other, keeping up a confusion of cries, taunts, menaces, and raillery, during the whole night; after which they resumed the conflict, and continued it until one was beaten. If a village was to be attacked, notice being received, the women and children were removed; and if the village was beaten they made presents to their conquerors. Such were the decorous habits of the warriors of the lower Columbia.

These were the people who lived almost exclusively by fishing, and whose climate was a mild and moist one. Fishing, in which both sexes engaged about equally, was an important accomplishment, since it was by fish they lived in this world; and by being good fishermen that they had hopes of the next one. The houses in which they lived, instead of being lodges made of buffalo skins, were of a large size and very [Pg 125] well constructed, being made out of cedar planks. An excavation was first made in the earth two or three feet deep, probably to secure greater warmth in winter. A double row of cedar posts was then planted firmly all round the excavation, and between these the planks were laid, or, sometimes cedar bark, so overlapped as to exclude the rain and wind. The ridge-pole of the roof was supported on a row of taller posts, passing through the centre of the building, and notched to receive it. The rafters were then covered with planks or bark, fastened down with ropes made of the fibre of the cedar bark. A house made in this manner, and often a hundred feet long by thirty or forty wide, accommodated several families, who each had their separate entrance and fireplace; the entrance being by a low oval-shaped door, and a flight of steps.

The canoes of these people were each cut out of a single log of cedar; and were often thirty feet long and five wide at midships. They were gaily painted, and their shape was handsome, with a very long bow so constructed as to cut the surf in landing with the greatest ease, or the more readily to go through a rough sea. The oars were about five feet long, and bent in the shape of a crescent; which shape enabled them to draw them edgewise through the water with little or no noise—this noiselessness being an important quality in hunting the sea otter, which is always caught sleeping on the rocks.

The single instrument which sufficed to build canoes and houses was the chisel; generally being a piece of old iron obtained from some vessel and fixed in a wooden handle. A stone mallet aided them in using the chisel; and with this simple "kit" of tools they contrived to manufacture plates, bowls, carved oars, and many ornamental things. [Pg 126]

Like the men of all savage nations, they made slaves of their captives, and their women. The dress of the latter consisted merely of a short petticoat, manufactured from the fibre of the cedar bark, previously soaked and prepared. This material was worked into a fringe, attached to a girdle, and only long enough to reach the middle of the thigh. When the season required it, they added a mantle of skins. Their bodies were anointed with fish-oil, and sometimes painted with red ochre in imitation of the men. For ornaments they wore strings of glass beads, and also of a white shell found on the northern coast, called *haiqua*. Such were the *Chinooks*, who lived upon the coast.

Farther up the river, on the eastern side of the Cascade range of mountains, a people

lived, the same, yet different from the Chinooks. They resembled them in form, features, and manner of getting a living. But they were more warlike and more enterprising; they even had some notions of commerce, being traders between the coast Indians and those to the east of them. They too were great fishermen, but used the net instead of fishing in boats. Great scaffoldings were erected every year at the narrows of the Columbia, known as the Dalles, where, as the salmon passed up the river in the spring, in incredible numbers, they were caught and dried. After drying, the fish were then pounded fine between two stones, pressed tightly into packages or bales of about a hundred pounds, covered with matting, and corded up for transportation. The bales were then placed in storehouses built to receive them, where they awaited customers.

By and by there came from the coast other Indians, with different varieties of fish, to exchange for the salmon in the Wish-ram warehouses. And by and by there came from the plains to the eastward, others who had horses, camas-root, bear-grass, fur [Pg 127] robes, and whatever constituted the wealth of the mountains and plains, to exchange for the rich and nutritious salmon of the Columbia. These Wish-ram Indians were sharp traders, and usually made something by their exchanges; so that they grew rich and insolent, and it was dangerous for the unwary stranger to pass their way. Of all the tribes of the Columbia, they perpetrated the most outrages upon their neighbors, the passing traveler, and the stranger within their gates.

Still farther to the east, on the great grassy plains, watered by beautiful streams, coming down from the mountains, lived the Cayuses, Yakimas, Nez Perces, Wallah-Wallahs, and Flatheads; as different in their appearance and habits as their different modes of living would naturally make them. Instead of having many canoes, they had many horses; and in place of drawing the fishing net, or trolling lazily along with hook and line, or spearing fish from a canoe, they rode pell-mell to the chase, or sallied out to battle with the hostile Blackfeet, whose country lay between them and the good hunting-grounds, where the great herds of buffalo were. Being Nimrods by nature, they were dressed in complete suits of skins, instead of going naked, like their brethren in the lower country. Being wandering and pastoral in their habits, they lived in lodges, which could be planted every night and raised every morning.

Their women, too, were good riders, and comfortably clad in dressed skins, kept white with chalk. So wealthy were some of the chiefs that they could count their fifteen hundred head of horses grazing on their grassy uplands. Horse-racing was their delight, and betting on them their besetting vice. For bridles they used horse-hair cords, attached around the animal's mouth. This was sufficient to check him, and [Pg 128] by laying a hand on this side or that of the horse's neck, the rider could wheel him in either direction. The simple and easy-fitting saddle was a stuffed deer-skin, with stirrups of wood, resembling in shape those used by the Mexicans, and covered with deer-skin sewed on wet, so as to tighten in drying. The saddles of the women were furnished with a pair of deer's antlers for the pommel.

In many things their customs and accoutrements resembled those of the Mexicans, from whom, no doubt, they were borrowed. Like the Mexican, they threw the lasso to catch the wild horse. Their horses, too, were of Mexican stock, and many of them bore the brand of that country, having been obtained in some of their not infrequent journeys into California and New Mexico.

As all the wild horses of America are said to have sprung from a small band, turned loose upon the plains by Cortez, it would be interesting to know at what time they came to be used by the northern Indians, or whether the horse and the Indian did not emigrate together. If the horse came to the Indian, great must have been the change effected by the advent of this new element in the savage's life. It is impossible to conceive, however, that the Indian ever could have lived on these immense plains, barren of everything but wild grass, without his horse. With him he does well enough, for he not only "lives on horseback," by which means he can quickly reach a country abounding in game, but he literally lives on horse-flesh, when other game is scarce.

Curious as the fact may seem, the Indians at the mouth of the Columbia and those of New Mexico speak languages similar in construction to that of the Aztecs; and from this fact, and the others before mentioned, it may be very fairly inferred that difference of circumstances and localities have made of the different tribes what they are. [Pg 129]

As to the Indian's moral nature, that is pretty much alike everywhere; and with some rare exceptions, the rarest of which is, perhaps, the Flathead and Nez Perces nations, all are cruel, thieving, and treacherous. The Indian gospel is literally the "gospel of blood"; an "eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." Vengeance is as much a commandment to him as any part of the decalogue is to the Christian. But we have digressed far from our narrative; and as it will be necessary to refer to the subject of the moral code of savages further on in our narrative, we leave it for the present.

After the incident of the pin and the fishes, Sublette's party kept on to the north, coursing along up Payette's River to Payette Lake, where he camped, and the men

went out trapping. A party of four, consisting of Meek, Antoine Godin, Louis Leaugar, and Small, proceeded to the north as far as the Salmon river and beyond, to the head of one of its tributaries, where the present city of Florence is located. While camped in this region, three of the men went out one day to look for their horses, which had strayed away, or been stolen by the Indians. During their absence, Meek, who remained in camp, had killed a fine fat deer, and was cooking a portion of it, when he saw a band of about a hundred Indians approaching, and so near were they that flight was almost certainly useless; yet as a hundred against one was very great odds, and running away from them would not increase their number, while it gave him something to do in his own defence, he took to his heels and ran as only a mountain-man can run. Instead, however, of pursuing him, the practical-minded braves set about finishing his cooking for him, and soon had the whole deer roasting before the fire.

This procedure provoked the gastronomic ire of our trapper, and after watching them for some time from his hiding-place, he determined to return and share the feast. On [Pg 130] reaching camp again, and introducing himself to his not over-scrupulous visitors, he found they were from the Nez Perces tribe inhabiting that region, who, having been so rude as to devour his stock of provisions, invited him to accompany them to their village, not a great way off, where they would make some return for his involuntary hospitality. This he did, and there found his three comrades and all their horses. While still visiting at the Nez Perces village, they were joined by the remaining portion of Sublette's command, when the whole company started south again. Passing Payette's lake to the east, traversing the Boise Basin, going to the head-waters of that river, thence to the Malade, thence to Godin's river, and finally to the forks of the Salmon, where they found the main camp. Captain Bonneville, of whose three years wanderings in the wilderness Mr. Irving has given a full and interesting account, was encamped in the same neighborhood, and had built there a small fort or trading-house, and finally wintered in the neighborhood.

An exchange of men now took place, and Meek went east of the mountains under Fitzpatrick and Bridger. When these famous leaders had first set out for the summer hunt, after the battle of Pierre's Hole, their course had been to the head-waters of the Missouri, to the Yellowstone lake, and the forks of the Missouri, some of the best beaver grounds known to them. But finding their steps dogged by the American Fur Company, and not wishing to be made use of as pilots by their rivals, they had flitted about for a time like an Arab camp, in the endeavor to blind them, and finally returned to the west side of the mountains, where Meek fell in with them.

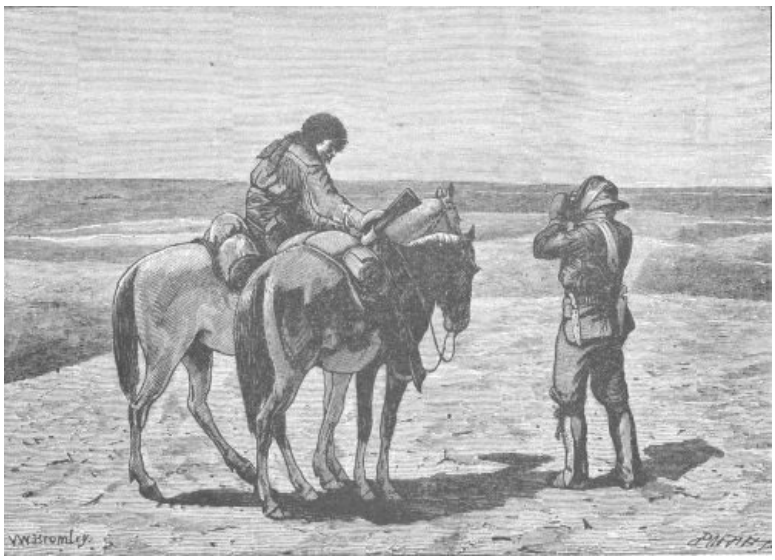
Exasperated by the perseverance of the American Company, they had come to the determination of leading them a march which should tire them of the practice of [Pg 131] keeping at their heels. They therefore planned an expedition, from which they expected no other profit than that of shaking off their rivals. Taking no pains to conceal their expedition, they rather held out the bait to the American Company, who, unsuspicious of their purpose, took it readily enough. They led them along across the mountains, and on to the head-waters of the Missouri. Here, packing up their traps, they tarried not for beaver, nor even tried to avoid the Blackfeet, but pushed right ahead, into the very heart of their country, keeping away from any part of it where beaver might be found, and going away on beyond, to the elevated plains, quite destitute of that small but desirable game, but followed through it by their rivals.

However justifiable on the part of trade this movement of the Rocky Mountain Company might have been, it was a cruel device as concerned the inexperienced leaders of the other company, one of whom lost his life in consequence. Not knowing of their danger, they only discovered their situation in the midst of Blackfeet, after discovering the ruse that had been played upon them. They then halted, and being determined to find beaver, divided their forces and set out in opposite directions for that purpose. Unhappily, Major Vanderburg took the worst possible direction for a small party to take, and had not traveled far when his scouts came upon the still smoking camp-fires of a band of Indians who were returning from a buffalo hunt. From the "signs" left behind them, the scout judged that they had become aware of the near neighborhood of white men, and from their having stolen off, he judged that they were only gone for others of their nation, or to prepare for war.

But Vanderburg, with the fool-hardiness of one not "up to Blackfeet," determined to [Pg 132] ascertain for himself what there was to fear; and taking with him half a score of his followers, put himself upon their trail, galloping hard after them, until, in his rashness, he found himself being led through a dark and deep defile, rendered darker and gloomier by overhanging trees. In the midst of this dismal place, just where an ambush might have been expected, he was attacked by a horde of savages, who rushed upon his little party with whoops and frantic gestures, intended not only to appal the riders, but to frighten their horses, and thus make surer their bloody butchery. It was but the work of a few minutes to consummate their demoniac purpose. Vanderburg's horse was shot down at once, falling on his rider, whom the Indians quickly dispatched. One or two of the men were instantly tomahawked, and

the others wounded while making their escape to camp. The remainder of Vanderburg's company, on learning the fate of their leader, whose place there was no one to fill, immediately raised camp and fled with all haste to the encampment of the Pends Oreille Indians for assistance. Here they waited, while those Indians, a friendly tribe, made an effort to recover the body of their unfortunate leader; but the remains were never recovered, probably having first been fiendishly mutilated, and then left to the wolves.

Fitzpatrick and Bridger, finding they were no longer pursued by their rivals, as the season advanced began to retrace their steps toward the good trapping grounds. Being used to Indian wiles and Blackfeet maraudings and ambushes, they traveled in close columns, and never camped or turned out their horses to feed, without the greatest caution. Morning and evening scouts were sent out to beat up every thicket or ravine that seemed to offer concealment to a foe, and the horizon was searched in every direction for signs of an Indian attack. The complete safety of the camp being settled almost beyond a peradventure, the horses were turned loose, though never left unguarded. [Pg 133]



SCOUTS IN THE BLACKFOOT COUNTRY—"ELK OR INDIANS?"

It was not likely, however, that the camp should pass through the Blackfoot country without any encounters with that nation. When it had reached the head-waters of the Missouri, on the return march, a party of trappers, including Meek, discovered a small band of Indians in a bend of the lake, and thinking the opportunity for sport a good one, commenced firing on them. The Indians, who were without guns, took to the lake for refuge, while the trappers entertained themselves with the rare amusement of keeping them in the water, by shooting at them occasionally. But it chanced that these were only a few stragglers from the main Blackfoot camp, which soon came up and put an end to the sport by putting the trappers to flight in their turn. The trappers fled to camp, the Indians pursuing, until the latter discovered that they had been led almost into the large camp of the whites. This occasioned a halt, the Blackfeet not caring to engage with superior numbers.

In the pause which ensued, one of the chiefs came out into the open space, bearing the peace pipe, and Bridger also advanced to meet him, but carrying his gun across the pommel of his saddle. He was accompanied by a young Blackfoot woman, wife of a Mexican in his service, as interpreter. The chief extended his hand in token of amity; but at that moment Bridger saw a movement of the chiefs, which he took to mean treachery, and cocked his rifle. But the lock had no sooner clicked than the chief, a large and powerful man, seized the gun and turned the muzzle downward, when the contents were discharged into the earth. With another dexterous movement he wrested it from Bridger's hand, and struck him with it, felling him to the ground. In an instant all was confusion. The noise of whoops, yells, of fire-arms, and of running hither and thither, gathered like a tempest. At the first burst of this demoniac blast, the horse of the interpreter became frightened, and, by a sudden movement, unhorsed her, wheeling and running back to camp. In the melee which now ensued, the woman was carried off by the Blackfeet, and Bridger was wounded twice in the back with arrows. A chance medley fight now ensued, continuing until night put a period to the contest. So well matched were the opposing forces, that each fought with caution firing from the cover of thickets and from behind rocks, neither side doing much execution. The loss on the part of the Blackfeet was nine warriors, and on that of the whites, three men and six horses. [Pg 134]

As for the young Blackfoot woman, whose people retained her a prisoner, her lamentations and struggles to escape and return to her husband and child so wrought upon the young Mexican, who was the pained witness of her grief, that he

took the babe in his arms, and galloped with it into the heart of the Blackfoot camp, to place it in the arms of the distracted mother. This daring act, which all who witnessed believed would cause his death, so excited the admiration of the Blackfoot chief, that he gave him permission to return, unharmed, to his own camp. Encouraged by this clemency, Loretta begged to have his wife restored to him, relating how he had rescued her, a prisoner, from the Crows, who would certainly have tortured her to death. The wife added her entreaties to his, but the chief sternly bade him depart, and as sternly reminded the Blackfoot girl that she belonged to his tribe, and could not go with his enemies. Loretta was therefore compelled to [Pg 135] abandon his wife and child, and return to camp.

It is, however, gratifying to know that so true an instance of affection in savage life was finally rewarded; and that when the two rival fur companies united, as they did in the following year, Loretta was permitted to go to the American Company's fort on the Missouri, in the Blackfoot country, where he was employed as interpreter, assisted by his Blackfoot wife.

Such were some of the incidents that signalized this campaign in the wilderness, where two equally persistent rivals were trying to outwit one another. Subsequently, when several years of rivalry had somewhat exhausted both, the Rocky Mountain and American companies consolidated, using all their strategy thereafter against the Hudson's Bay Company, and any new rival that chanced to enter their hunting grounds.

After the fight above described, the Blackfeet drew off in the night, showing no disposition to try their skill next day against such experienced Indian fighters as Bridger's brigade had shown themselves. The company continued in the Missouri country, trapping and taking many beaver, until it reached the Beaver Head Valley, on the head-waters of the Jefferson fork of the Missouri. Here the lateness of the season compelled a return to winter-quarters, and by Christmas all the wanderers were gathered into camp at the forks of the Snake River.

1833. In the latter part of January it became necessary to move to the junction of the Portneuf to subsist the animals. The main body of the camp had gone on in advance, while some few, with pack horses, or women with children, were scattered along the trail. Meek, with five others, had been left behind to gather up some horses that had strayed. When about a half day's journey from camp, he overtook *Umentucken*, the [Pg 136] Mountain Lamb, now the wife of Milton Sublette, with her child, on horseback. The weather was terribly cold, and seeming to grow colder. The naked plains afforded no shelter from the piercing winds, and the air fairly glittered with frost. Poor Umentucken was freezing, but more troubled about her babe than herself. The camp was far ahead, with all the extra blankets, and the prospect was imminent that they would perish. Our gallant trapper had thought himself very cold until this moment, but what were his sufferings compared to those of the Mountain Lamb and her little Lambkin? Without an instant's hesitation, he divested himself of his blanket capote, which he wrapped round the mother and child, and urged her to hasten to camp. For himself, he could not hasten, as he had the horses in charge, but all that fearful afternoon rode naked above the waist, exposed to the wind, and the fine, dry, icy hail, which filled the air as with diamond needles, to pierce the skin; and, probably, to the fact that the hail *was* so stinging, was owing the fact that his blood did not congeal.

"O what a day was that!" said Meek to the writer; "why, the air war thick with fine, sharp hail, and the sun shining, too! not one sun only, but three suns—there were *three* suns! And when night came on, the northern lights blazed up the sky! It was the most beautiful sight I ever saw. That is the country for northern lights!"

When some surprise was expressed that he should have been obliged to expose his naked skin to the weather, in order to save Umentucken—"In the mountains," he answered, "we do not have many garments. Buckskin breeches, a blanket capote, and a beaver skin cap makes up our rig." [Pg 137]

"You do not need a laundress, then? But with such clothing how could you keep free of vermin?"

"We didn't always do that. Do you want to know how we got rid of lice in the mountains? We just took off our clothes and laid them on an ant-hill, and you ought to see how the ants would carry off the lice!"

But to return to our hero, frozen, or nearly so. When he reached camp at night, so desperate was his condition that the men had to roll him and rub him in the snow for some time before allowing him to approach the fire. But Umentucken was saved, and he became heroic in her eyes. Whether it was the glory acquired by the gallant act just recorded, or whether our hero had now arrived at an age when the tender passion has strongest sway, the writer is unprepared to affirm: for your mountain-man is shy of revealing his past gallantries; but from this time on, there are evidences of considerable susceptibility to the charms of the dusky beauties of the mountains and the plains.

The cold of this winter was very severe, insomuch that men and mules were frozen to death. "The frost," says Meek, "used to hang from the roofs of our lodges in the morning, on first waking, in skeins two feet long, and our blankets and whiskers were white with it. But we trappers laid still, and called the camp-keepers to make a fire, and in our close lodges it was soon warm enough.

"The Indians suffered very much. Fuel war scarce on the Snake River, and but little fire could be afforded—just sufficient for the children and their mothers to get warm by, for the fire was fed only with buffalo fat torn in strips, which blazed up quickly and did not last long. Many a time I have stood off, looking at the fire, but not venturing to approach, when a chief would say, 'Are you cold, my friend? come to the fire'—so kind are these Nez Perces and Flatheads." [Pg 138]

The cold was not the only enemy in camp that winter, but famine threatened them. The buffalo had been early driven east of the mountains, and other game was scarce. Sometimes a party of hunters were absent for days, even weeks, without finding more game than would subsist themselves. As the trappers were all hunters in the winter, it frequently happened that Meek and one or more of his associates went on a hunt in company, for the benefit of the camp, which was very hungry at times.

On one of these hunting expeditions that winter, the party consisting of Meek, Hawkins, Doughty, and Antoine Claymore, they had been out nearly a fortnight without killing anything of consequence, and had clambered up the side of the mountains on the frozen snow, in hopes of finding some mountain sheep. As they traveled along under a projecting ledge of rocks, they came to a place where there were the impressions in the snow of enormous grizzly bear feet. Close by was an opening in the rocks, revealing a cavern, and to this the tracks in the snow conducted. Evidently the creature had come out of its winter den, and made just one circuit back again. At these signs of game the hunters hesitated—certain it was there, but doubtful how to obtain it.

At length Doughty proposed to get up on the rocks above the mouth of the cavern and shoot the bear as he came out, if somebody would go in and dislodge him.

"I'm your man," answered Meek.

"And I too," said Claymore.

"I'll be —— if we are not as brave as you are," said Hawkins, as he prepared to follow.

On entering the cave, which was sixteen or twenty feet square, and high enough to stand erect in, instead of one, three bears were discovered. They were standing, the largest one in the middle, with their eyes staring at the entrance, but quite quiet, [Pg 139] greeting the hunters only with a low growl. Finding that there was a bear apiece to be disposed of, the hunters kept close to the wall, and out of the stream of light from the entrance, while they advanced a little way, cautiously, towards their game, which, however, seemed to take no notice of them. After maneuvering a few minutes to get nearer, Meek finally struck the large bear on the head with his wiping-stick, when it immediately moved off and ran out of the cave. As it came out, Doughty shot, but only wounded it, and it came rushing back, snorting, and running around in a circle, till the well directed shots from all three killed it on the spot. Two more bears now remained to be disposed of.

The successful shot put Hawkins in high spirits. He began to hallo and laugh, dancing around, and with the others striking the next largest bear to make him run out, which he soon did, and was shot by Doughty. By this time their guns were reloaded, the men growing more and more elated, and Hawkins declaring they were "all Daniels in the lions' den, and no mistake." This, and similar expressions, he constantly vociferated, while they drove out the third and smallest bear. As it reached the cave's mouth, three simultaneous shots put an end to the last one, when Hawkins' excitement knew no bounds. "Daniel was a humbug," said he. "Daniel in the lions' den! Of course it was winter, and the lions were sucking their paws! Tell me no more of Daniel's exploits. We are as good Daniels as he ever dared to be. Hurrah for these Daniels!" With these expressions, and playing many antics by way of rejoicing, the delighted Hawkins finally danced himself out of his "lion's den," and set to work with the others to prepare for a return to camp.

Sleds were soon constructed out of the branches of the mountain willow, and on [Pg 140] these light vehicles the fortunate find of bear meat was soon conveyed to the hungry camp in the plain below. And ever after this singular exploit of the party, Hawkins continued to aver, in language more strong than elegant, that the Scripture Daniel was a humbug compared to himself, and Meek, and Claymore.

CHAPTER VIII.

1833. In the spring the camp was visited by a party of twenty Blackfeet, who drove off most of the horses; and among the stolen ones, Bridger's favorite race-horse, Grohean, a Camanche steed of great speed and endurance. To retake the horses, and if possible punish the thieves, a company of the gamest trappers, thirty in number, including Meek, and Kit Carson, who not long before had joined the Rocky Mountain Company, was dispatched on their trail. They had not traveled long before they came up with the Blackfeet, but the horses were nowhere to be seen, having been secreted, after the manner of these thieves, in some defile of the mountains, until the skirmish was over which they knew well enough to anticipate. Accordingly when the trappers came up, the wily savages were prepared for them. Their numbers were inferior to that of the whites; accordingly they assumed an innocent and peace-desiring air, while their head man advanced with the inevitable peace-pipe, to have a "talk." But as their talk was a tissue of lies, the trappers soon lost patience, and a quarrel quickly arose. The Indians betook themselves to the defences which were selected beforehand, and a fight began, which without giving to either party the victory of arms, ended in the killing of two or three of the Blackfeet, and the wounding very severely of Kit Carson. The firing ceased with nightfall; and when morning came, as usual the Blackfeet were gone, and the trappers returned to camp without their horses. [Pg 142]

The lost animals were soon replaced by purchase from the Nez Perces, and the company divided up into brigades, some destined for the country east of the mountains, and others for the south and west. In this year Meek rose a grade above the hired trapper, and became one of the order denominated skin trappers. These, like the hired trappers, depend upon the company to furnish them an outfit; but do not receive regular wages, as do the others. They trap for themselves, only agreeing to sell their beaver to the company which furnishes the outfit, and to no other. In this capacity, our Joe, and a few associates, hunted this spring, in the Snake River and Salt Lake countries; returning as usual to the annual rendezvous, which was appointed this summer to meet on Green River. Here were the Rocky Mountain and American Companies; the St. Louis Company, under Capt. Wm. Sublette and his friend Campbell; the usual camp of Indian allies; and, a few miles distant, that of Captain Bonneville. In addition to all these, was a small company belonging to Capt. Stuart, an Englishman of noble family, who was traveling in the far west only to gratify his own love of wild adventure, and admiration of all that is grand and magnificent in nature. With him was an artist named Miller, and several servants; but he usually traveled in company with one or another of the fur companies; thus enjoying their protection, and at the same time gaining a knowledge of the habits of mountain life.

The rendezvous, at this time, furnished him a striking example of some of the ways of mountain-men, least to their honorable fame; and we fear we must confess that our friend Joe Meek, who had been gathering laurels as a valiant hunter and trapper during the three or four years of his apprenticeship, was also becoming fitted, by frequent practice, to graduate in some of the vices of camp life, especially the one of [Pg 143] conviviality during rendezvous. Had he not given his permission, we should not perhaps have said what he says of himself, that he was at such times often very "powerful drunk."

During the indulgence of these excesses, while at this rendezvous, there occurred one of those incidents of wilderness life which make the blood creep with horror. Twelve of the men were bitten by a mad wolf, which hung about the camp for two or three nights. Two of these were seized with madness in camp, sometime afterwards, and ran off into the mountains, where they perished. One was attacked by the paroxysm while on a hunt; when, throwing himself off his horse, he struggled and foamed at the mouth, gnashing his teeth, and barking like a wolf. Yet he retained consciousness enough to warn away his companions, who hastened in search of assistance; but when they returned he was nowhere to be found. It was thought that he was seen a day or two afterwards, but no one could come up with him, and of course, he too, perished. Another died on his journey to St. Louis; and several died at different times within the next two years.

At the time, however, immediately following the visit of the wolf to camp, Captain Stuart was admonishing Meek on the folly of his ways, telling him that the wolf might easily have bitten him, he was so drunk.

"It would have killed him,—sure, if it hadn't cured him!" said Meek,—alluding to the belief that alcohol is a remedy for the poison of hydrophobia.

When sobriety returned, and work was once more to be resumed, Meek returned with three or four associates to the Salt Lake country, to trap on the numerous streams that flow down from the mountains to the east of Salt Lake. He had not been long in this region when he fell in on Bear River with a company of Bonneville's men, one hundred and eighteen in number, under Jo Walker, who had been sent to explore [Pg 144] the Great Salt Lake, and the adjacent country; to make charts, keep a journal, and, in short, make a thorough discovery of all that region. Great expectations were cherished by the Captain concerning this favorite expedition, which were, however,

utterly blighted, as his historian has recorded. The disappointment and loss which Bonneville suffered from it, gave a tinge of prejudice to his delineations of the trapper's character. It was true that they did not explore Salt Lake; and that they made a long and expensive journey, collecting but few peltries. It is true also, that they caroused in true mountain style, while among the Californians: but that the expedition was unprofitable was due chiefly to the difficulties attending the exploration of a new country, a large portion of which was desert and mountain.

But let us not anticipate. When Meek and his companions fell in with Jo Walker and his company, they resolved to accompany the expedition; for it was "a feather in a man's cap," and made his services doubly valuable to have become acquainted with a new country, and fitted himself for a pilot.

On leaving Bear River, where the hunters took the precaution to lay in a store of dried meat, the company passed down on the west side of Salt Lake, and found themselves in the Salt Lake desert, where their store, insufficiently large, soon became reduced to almost nothing. Here was experienced again the sufferings to which Meek had once before been subjected in the Digger country, which, in fact, bounded this desert on the northwest. "There was," says Bonneville, "neither tree, nor herbage, nor spring, nor pool, nor running stream; nothing but parched wastes of sand, where horse and rider were in danger of perishing." Many an emigrant has since confirmed the truth of this account. [Pg 145]

It could not be expected that men would continue on in such a country, in that direction which offered no change for the better. Discerning at last a snowy range to the northwest, they traveled in that direction; pinched with famine, and with tongues swollen out of their mouths with thirst. They came at last to a small stream, into which both men and animals plunged to quench their raging thirst.

The instinct of a mule on these desert journeys is something wonderful. We have heard it related by others besides the mountain-men, that they will detect the neighborhood of water long before their riders have discovered a sign; and setting up a gallop, when before they could hardly walk, will dash into the water up to their necks, drinking in the life-saving moisture through every pore of the skin, while they prudently refrain from swallowing much of it. If one of a company has been off on a hunt for water, and on finding it has let his mule drink, when he returns to camp, the other animals will gather about it, and snuff its breath, and even its body, betraying the liveliest interest and envy. It is easy to imagine that in the case of Jo Walker's company, not only the animals but the men were eager to steep themselves in the reviving waters of the first stream which they found on the border of this weary desert.

It proved to be a tributary of Mary's or Ogden's River, along which the company pursued their way, trapping as they went, and living upon the flesh of the beaver. They had now entered upon the same country inhabited by Digger Indians, in which Milton Sublette's brigade had so nearly perished with famine the previous year. It was unexplored, and the natives were as curious about the movements of their white visitors, as Indians always are on the first appearance of civilized men. [Pg 146]

They hung about the camps, offering no offences by day, but contriving to do a great deal of thieving during the night-time. Each day, for several days, their numbers increased, until the army which dogged the trappers by day, and filched from them at night, numbered nearly a thousand. They had no guns; but carried clubs, and some bows and arrows. The trappers at length became uneasy at this accumulation of force, even though they had no fire-arms, for was it not this very style of people, armed with clubs, that attacked Smith's party on the Umpqua, and killed all but four?

"We must kill a lot of them, boys," said Jo Walker. "It will never do to let that crowd get into camp." Accordingly, as the Indians crowded round at a ford of Mary's River, always a favorite time of attack with the savages, Walker gave the order to fire, and the whole company poured a volley into the jostling crowd. The effect was terrible. Seventy-five Diggers bit the dust; while the others, seized with terror and horror at this new and instantaneous mode of death, fled howling away, the trappers pursuing them until satisfied that they were too much frightened to return. This seemed to Captain Bonneville, when he came to hear of it, like an unnecessary and ferocious act. But Bonneville was not an experienced Indian fighter. His views of their character were much governed by his knowledge of the Flatheads and Nez Perces; and also by the immunity from harm he enjoyed among the Shoshonies on the Snake River, where the Hudson's Bay Company had brought them into subjection, and where even two men might travel in safety at the time of his residence in that country.

Walker's company continued on down to the main or Humboldt River, trapping as they went, both for the furs, and for something to eat; and expecting to find that the river whose course they were following through these barren plains, would lead them to some more important river, or to some large lake or inland sea. This was a country entirely unknown, even to the adventurous traders and trappers of the fur companies, who avoided it because it was out of the buffalo range; and because the [Pg 147]

borders of it, along which they sometimes skirted, were found to be wanting in water-courses in which beaver might be looked for. Walker's company therefore, now determined to prosecute their explorations until they came to some new and profitable beaver grounds.

But after a long march through an inhospitable country they came at last to where the Humboldt sinks itself in a great swampy lake, in the midst of deserts of sage-brush. Here was the end of their great expectations. To the west of them, however, and not far off, rose the lofty summits of the Sierra Nevada range, some of whose peaks were covered with eternal snows. Since they had already made an unprofitable business of their expedition, and failed in its principal aim, that of exploring Salt Lake, they resolved upon crossing the mountains into California, and seeking new fields of adventure on the western side of the Nevada mountains.

Accordingly, although it was already late in the autumn, the party pushed on toward the west, until they came to Pyramid Lake, another of those swampy lakes which are frequently met with near the eastern base of these Sierras. Into this flowed a stream similar to the Humboldt, which came from the south, and, they believed, had its rise in the mountains. As it was important to find a good pass, they took their course along this stream, which they named Trucker's River, and continued along it to its head-waters in the Sierras.

And now began the arduous labor of crossing an unknown range of lofty mountains. [Pg 148] Mountaineers as they were, they found it a difficult undertaking, and one attended with considerable peril. For a period of more than three weeks they were struggling with these dangers; hunting paths for their mules and horses, traveling around canyons thousands of feet deep; sometimes sinking in new fallen snow; always hungry, and often in peril from starvation. Sometimes they scrambled up almost smooth declivities of granite, that offered no foothold save the occasional seams in the rock; at others they traveled through pine forests made nearly impassable by snow; and at other times on a ridge which wind and sun made bare for them. All around rose rocky peaks and pinnacles fretted by ages of denudation to very spears and needles of a burnt looking, red colored rock. Below, were spread out immense fields, or rather oceans, of granite that seemed once to have been a molten sea, whose waves were suddenly congealed. From the fissures between these billows grew stunted pines, which had found a scanty soil far down in the crevices of the rock for their hardy roots. Following the course of any stream flowing in the right direction for their purpose, they came not infrequently to some small fertile valley, set in amidst the rocks like a cup, and often containing in its depth a bright little lake. These are the oases in the mountain deserts. But the lateness of the season made it necessary to avoid the high valleys on account of the snow, which in winter accumulates to a depth of twenty feet.

Great was the exultation of the mountaineers when they emerged from the toils and dangers, safe into the bright and sunny plains of California; having explored almost the identical route since fixed upon for the Union Pacific Railroad.

They proceeded down the Sacramento valley, toward the coast, after recruiting their [Pg 149] horses on the ripe wild oats, and the freshly springing grass which the December rains had started into life, and themselves on the plentiful game of the foot-hills. Something of the stimulus of the Californian climate seemed to be imparted to the ever buoyant blood of these hardy and danger-despising men. They were mad with delight on finding themselves, after crossing the stern Sierras, in a land of sunshine and plenty; a beautiful land of verdant hills and tawny plains; of streams winding between rows of alder and willow, and valleys dotted with picturesque groves of the evergreen oak. Instead of the wild blasts which they were used to encounter in December, they experienced here only those dainty and wooing airs which poets have ascribed to spring, but which seldom come even with the last May days in an eastern climate.

In the San José valley they encountered a party of one hundred soldiers, which the Spanish government at Monterey had sent out to take a party of Indians accused of stealing cattle. The soldiers were native Californians, descendants of the mixed blood of Spain and Mexico, a wild, jaunty looking set of fellows, who at first were inclined to take Walker's party for a band of cattle thieves, and to march them off to Monterey. But the Rocky Mountain trapper was not likely to be taken prisoner by any such brigade as the dashing *cabelleros* of Monterey.

After astonishing them with a series of whoops and yells, and trying to astonish them with feats of horsemanship, they began to discover that when it came to the latter accomplishment, even mountain-men could learn something from a native Californian. In this latter frame of mind they consented to be conducted to Monterey as prisoners or not, just as the Spanish government should hereafter be pleased to decree; and they had confidence in themselves that they should be able to bend that [Pg 150] high and mighty authority to their own purposes thereafter.

Nor were they mistaken in their calculations. Their fearless, free and easy style, united to their complete furnishing of arms, their numbers, and their superior ability

to stand up under the demoralizing effect of the favorite *aguadiente*, soon so far influenced the soldiery at least, that the trappers were allowed perfect freedom under the very eyes of the jealous Spanish government, and were treated with all hospitality.

The month which the trappers spent at Monterey was their "red letter day" for a long time after. The habits of the Californians accorded with their own, with just difference enough to furnish them with novelties and excitements such as gave a zest to their intercourse. The Californian, and the mountain-men, were alike centaurs. Horses were their necessity, and their delight; and the plains swarmed with them, as also with wild cattle, descendants of those imported by the Jesuit Fathers in the early days of the Missions. These horses and cattle were placed at the will and pleasure of the trappers. They feasted on one, and bestrode the other as it suited them. They attended bull-fights, ran races, threw the lasso, and played monte, with a relish that delighted the inhabitants of Monterey.

The partial civilization of the Californians accorded with every feeling to which the mountain-men could be brought to confess. To them the refinements of cities would have been oppressive. The adobe houses of Monterey were not so restraining in their elegance as to trouble the sensations of men used to the heavens for a roof in summer, and a skin lodge for shelter in winter. Some fruits and vegetables, articles not tasted for years, they obtained at the missions, where the priests received them courteously and hospitably, as they had done Jedediah Smith and his company, five years before, when on their long and disastrous journey they found themselves almost destitute of the necessaries of life, upon their arrival in California. There was something too, in the dress of the people, both men and women, which agreed with, while differing from, the dress of the mountaineers and their now absent Indian dulcineas. [Pg 151]

BRANDING CATTLE.

The men wore garments of many colors, consisting of blue velveteen breeches and jacket, the jacket having a scarlet collar and cuffs, and the breeches being open at the knee to display the stocking of white. Beneath these were displayed high buskins made of deer skin, fringed down the outside of the ankle, and laced with a cord and tassels. On the head was worn a broad brimmed *sombrero*; and over the shoulders the jaunty Mexican *sarape*. When they rode, the Californians wore enormous spurs, fastened on by jingling chains. Their saddles were so shaped that it was difficult to dislodge the rider, being high before and behind; and the indispensable lasso hung coiled from the pommel. Their stirrups were of wood, broad on the bottom, with a guard of leather that protected the fancy buskin of the horseman from injury. Thus accoutred, and mounted on a wild horse, the Californian was a suitable comrade, in appearance, at least, for the buckskin clad trapper, with his high beaver-skin cap, his gay scarf, and moccasins, and profusion of arms.

The dress of the women was a gown of gaudy calico or silk, and a bright colored shawl, which served for mantilla and bonnet together. They were well formed, with languishing eyes and soft voices; and doubtless appeared charming in the eyes of our band of trappers, with whom they associated freely at fandangoes, bull-fights, or bear-baitings. In such company, what wonder that Bonneville's men lingered for a whole month! What wonder that the California expedition was a favorite theme by camp-fires, for a long time subsequent? [Pg 152]

1834. In February the trappers bethought themselves of returning to the mountains. The route fixed upon was one which should take them through Southern California, and New Mexico, along the course of all the principal rivers. Crossing the coast mountains, into the valley of the San Joaquin, they followed its windings until they came to its rise in the Lulare Lake. Thence turning in a southeasterly course, they came to the Colorado, at the Mohave villages, where they traded with the natives,

whom they found friendly. Keeping on down the Colorado, to the mouth of the Gila, they turned back from that river, and ascended the Colorado once more, to Williams' Fork, and up the latter stream to some distance, when they fell in with a company of sixty men under Frapp and Jervais, two of the partners in the Rocky Mountain Company. The meeting was joyful on all sides; but particularly so between Meek and some of his old comrades, with whom he had fought Indians and grizzly bears, or set beaver traps on some lonely stream in the Blackfoot country. A lively exchange of questions and answers took place, while gaiety and good feeling reigned.

Frapp had been out quite as long as the Monterey party. It was seldom that the brigade which traversed the southern country, on the Colorado, and its large tributaries, returned to winter quarters; for in the region where they trapped winter was unknown, and the journey to the northern country a long and hazardous one. But the reunited trappers had each their own experiences to relate.

The two companies united made a party nearly two hundred strong. Keeping with Frapp, they crossed over from Williams' Fork to the Colorado Chiquito river, at the [Pg 153] Moquis village, where some of the men disgraced themselves far more than did Jo Walker's party at the crossing of Mary's River. For the Moquis were a half-civilized nation, who had houses and gardens, and conducted themselves kindly, or at the worst peaceably, toward properly behaved strangers. These trappers, instead of approaching them with offers of purchase, lawlessly entered their gardens, rifling them of whatever fruit or melons were ripe, and not hesitating to destroy that which was not ripe. To this, as might be expected, the Moquises objected; and were shot down for so doing. In this truly infamous affair fifteen or twenty of them were killed.

"I didn't belong to that crowd," says Joe Meek, "I sat on the fence and saw it, though. It was a shameful thing."

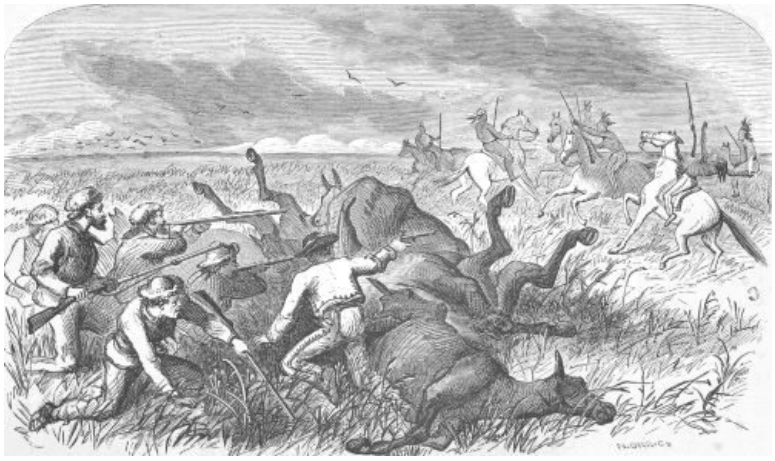
From the Moquis village, the joint companies crossed the country in a northeasterly direction, crossing several branches of the Colorado at their head-waters, which course finally brought them to the head-waters of the Rio Grande. The journey from the mouth of the Gila, though long, extended over a country comparatively safe. Either farther to the south or east, the caravan would have been in danger of a raid from the most dangerous tribes on the continent.

CHAPTER IX.

1834. But Joe Meek was not destined to return to the Rocky Mountains without having had an Indian fight. If adventures did not come in his way he was the man to put himself in the way of adventures.

While the camp was on its way from the neighborhood of Grande River to the New Park, Meek, Kit Carson, and Mitchell, with three Delaware Indians, named Tom Hill, Manhead, and Jonas, went on a hunt across to the east of Grande River, in the country lying between the Arkansas and Cimarron, where numerous small branches of these rivers head together, or within a small extent of country.

They were about one hundred and fifty miles from camp, and traveling across the open plain between the streams, one beautiful May morning, when about five miles off they descried a large band of Indians mounted, and galloping toward them. As they were in the Camanche country, they knew what to expect if they allowed themselves to be taken prisoners. They gave but a moment to the observation of their foes, but that one moment revealed a spirited scene. Fully two hundred Camanches, their warriors in front, large and well formed men, mounted on fleet and powerful horses, armed with spears and battle axes, racing like the wind over the prairie, their feather head-dresses bending to the breeze, that swept past them in the race with double force; all distinctly seen in the clear air of the prairie, and giving the beholder [Pg 155] a thrill of fear mingled with admiration.



THE MULE FORT.

The first moment given to this spectacle, the second one was employed to devise some means of escape. To run was useless. The swift Camanche steeds would soon overtake them; and then their horrible doom was fixed. No covert was at hand, neither thicket nor ravine, as in the mountains there might have been. Carson and Meek exchanged two or three sentences. At last, "we must kill our mules!" said they.

That seems a strange devise to the uninitiated reader, who no doubt believes that in such a case their mules must be their salvation. And so they were intended to be. In this plight a dead mule was far more useful than a live one. To the ground sprang every man; and placing their mules, seven in number, in a ring, they in an instant cut their throats with their hunting knives, and held on to the bridles until each animal fell dead in its appointed place. Then hastily scooping up what earth they could with knives, they made themselves a fort—a hole to stand in for each man, and a dead mule for a breastwork.

In less than half an hour the Camanches charged on them; the medicine-man in advance shouting, gesticulating, and making a desperate clatter with a rattle which he carried and shook violently. The yelling, the whooping, the rattling, the force of the charge were appalling. But the little garrison in the mule fort did not waver. The Camanche horses did. They could not be made to charge upon the bloody carcasses of the mules, nor near enough for their riders to throw a spear into the fort.

This was what the trappers had relied upon. They were cool and determined, while terribly excited and wrought up by their situation. It was agreed that no more than three should fire at a time, the other three reserving their fire while the empty guns could be reloaded. They were to pick their men, and kill one at every shot. [Pg 156]

They acted up to their regulations. At the charge the Camanche horses recoiled and could not be urged upon the fort of slaughtered mules. The three whites fired first, and the medicine-man and two other Camanches fell. When a medicine-man is killed, the others retire to hold a council and appoint another, for without their "medicine" they could not expect success in battle. This was time gained. The warriors retired, while their women came up and carried off the dead.

After devoting a little time to bewailing the departed, another chief was appointed to the head place, and another furious charge was made with the same results as before. Three more warriors bit the dust; while the spears of their brethren, attached to long hair ropes by which they could be withdrawn, fell short of reaching the men in the fort. Again and again the Camanches made a fruitless charge, losing, as often as they repeated it, three warriors, either dead or wounded. Three times that day the head chief or medicine-man was killed; and when that happened, the heroes in the fort got a little time to breathe. While the warriors held a council, the women took care of the wounded and slain.

As the women approached the fort to carry off the fallen warriors, they mocked and reviled the little band of trappers, calling them "women," for fighting in a fort, and resorting to the usual Indian ridicule and gasconade. Occasionally, also, a warrior raced at full speed past the fort apparently to take observations. Thus the battle continued through the entire day.

It was terrible work for the trappers. The burning sun of the plains shone on them, scorching them to faintness. Their faces were begrimed with powder and dust; their throats parched, and tongues swollen with thirst, and their whole frames aching from their cramped positions, as well as the excitement and fatigue of the battle. But they dared not relax their vigilance for a moment. They were fighting for their lives, and they meant to win. [Pg 157]

At length the sun set on that bloody and wearisome day. Forty-two Camanches were killed, and several more wounded, for the charge had been repeated fifteen or twenty times. The Indians drew off at nightfall to mourn over their dead, and hold a council.

Probably they had lost faith in their medicines, or believed that the trappers possessed one far greater than any of theirs. Under the friendly cover of the night, the six heroes who had fought successfully more than a hundred Camanches, took each his blanket and his gun, and bidding a brief adieu to dead mules and beaver packs, set out to return to camp.

When a mountain-man had a journey to perform on foot, to travel express, or to escape from an enemy, he fell into what is called a dog trot, and ran in that manner, sometimes, all day. On the present occasion, the six, escaping for life, ran all night, and found no water for seventy-five mile. When they did at last come to a clear running stream, their thankfulness was equal to their necessity, "for," says Meek, "thirst is the greatest suffering I ever experienced. It is far worse than hunger or pain."

Having rested and refreshed themselves at the stream, they kept on without much delay until they reached camp in that beautiful valley of the Rocky Mountains called the New, or the South Park.

While they remained in the South Park, Mr. Guthrie, one of the Rocky Mountain Company's traders, was killed by lightning. A number of persons were collected in the lodge of the Booshway, Frapp, to avoid the rising tempest, when Guthrie, who was leaning against the lodge pole, was struck by a flash of the electric current, and [Pg 158] fell dead instantly. Frapp rushed out of the lodge, partly bewildered himself by the shock, and under the impression that Guthrie had been shot. Frapp was a German, and spoke English somewhat imperfectly. In the excitement of the moment he shouted out, "By ——, who did shoot Guttery!"

"— a'——, I expect: He's a firing into camp;" drawled out Hawkins, whose ready wit was very disregardful of sacred names and subjects.

The mountaineers were familiar with the most awful aspects of nature; and if their familiarity had not bred contempt, it had at least hardened them to those solemn impressions which other men would have felt under their influence.

From New Park, Meek traveled north with the main camp, passing first to the Old Park; thence to the Little Snake, a branch of Bear River; thence to Pilot Butte; and finally to Green River to rendezvous; having traveled in the past year about three thousand miles, on horseback, through new and often dangerous countries. It is easy to believe that the Monterey expedition was the popular theme in camp during rendezvous. It had been difficult to get volunteers for Bonneville's Salt Lake Exploration: but such was the wild adventure to which it led, that volunteering for a trip to Monterey would have been exceedingly popular immediately thereafter.

On Bear River, Bonneville's men fell in with their commander, Captain Bonneville, whose disappointment and indignation at the failure of his plans was exceedingly great. In this indignation there was considerable justice; yet much of his disappointment was owing to causes which a more experienced trader would have avoided. The only conclusion which can be arrived at by an impartial observer of the [Pg 159] events of 1832-35, is, that none but certain men of long experience and liberal means, could succeed in the business of the fur-trade. There were too many chances of loss; too many wild elements to be mingled in amity; and too powerful opposition from the old established companies. Captain Bonneville's experience was no different from Mr. Wyeth's. In both cases there was much effort, outlay, and loss. Nor was their failure owing to any action of the Hudson's Bay Company, different from, or more tyrannical, than the action of the American companies, as has frequently been represented. It was the American companies in the Rocky Mountains that drove both Bonneville and Wyeth out of the field. Their inexperience could not cope with the thorough knowledge of the business, and the country, which their older rivals possessed. Raw recruits were no match, in trapping or fighting, for old mountaineers: and those veterans who had served long under certain leaders could not be inveigled from their service except upon the most extravagant offers; and these extravagant wages, which if one paid, the other must, would not allow a profit to either of the rivals.

"How much does your company pay you?" asked Bonneville of Meek, to whom he was complaining of the conduct of his men on the Monterey expedition.

"Fifteen hundred dollars," answered Meek.

"Yes: and *I* will give it to you," said Bonneville with bitterness.

It was quite true. Such was the competition aroused by the Captain's efforts to secure good men and pilots, that rather than lose them to a rival company, the Rocky Mountain Company paid a few of their best men the wages above named.

CHAPTER X.

1834. The gossip at rendezvous was this year of an unusually exciting character. Of the brigades which left for different parts of the country the previous summer, the Monterey travelers were not the only ones who had met with adventures. Fitzpatrick, who had led a party into the Crow country that autumn, had met with a characteristic reception from that nation of cunning vagabonds.

Being with his party on Lougue River, in the early part of September, he discovered that he was being dogged by a considerable band of Crows, and endeavored to elude their spying; but all to no purpose. The Crow chief kept in his neighborhood, and finally expressed a desire to bring his camp alongside that of Fitzpatrick, pretending to the most friendly and honorable sentiments toward his white neighbors. But not feeling any confidence in Crow friendship, Fitzpatrick declined, and moved camp a few miles away. Not, however, wishing to offend the dignity of the apparently friendly chief, he took a small escort, and went to pay a visit to his Crow neighbors, that they might see that he was not afraid to trust them. Alas, vain subterfuge!

While he was exchanging civilities with the Crow chief, a party of the young braves stole out of camp, and taking advantage of the leader's absence, made an attack on his camp, so sudden and successful that not a horse, nor anything else which they could make booty of was left. Even Captain Stuart, who was traveling with [Pg 161] Fitzpatrick, and who was an active officer, was powerless to resist the attack, and had to consent to see the camp rifled of everything valuable.

In the meantime Fitzpatrick, after concluding his visit in the most amicable manner, was returning to camp, when he was met by the exultant braves, who added insult to injury by robbing him of his horse, gun, and nearly all his clothes, leaving him to return to his party in a deplorable condition, to the great amusement of the trappers, and his own chagrin.

However, the next day a talk was held with the head chief of the Crows, to whom Fitzpatrick represented the infamy of such treacherous conduct in a very strong light. In answer to this reproof, the chief disowned all knowledge of the affair; saying that he could not always control the conduct of the young men, who would be a little wild now and then, in spite of the best Crow precepts: but that he would do what he could to have the property restored. Accordingly, after more talk, and much eloquence on the part of Fitzpatrick, the chief part of the plunder was returned to him, including the horses and rifles of the men, together with a little ammunition, and a few beaver traps.

Fitzpatrick understood the meaning of this apparent fairness, and hastened to get out of the Crow country before another raid by the mischievous young braves, at a time when their chief was not "honor bound," should deprive him of the recovered property. That his conjecture was well founded, was proven by the numerous petty thefts which were committed, and by the loss of several horses and mules, before he could remove them beyond the limits of the Crow territory.

While the trappers exchanged accounts of their individual experiences, the leaders [Pg 162] had more important matters to gossip over. The rivalry between the several fur companies was now at its climax. Through the energy and ability of Captain Sublette of the St. Louis Company, and the experience and industry of the Rocky Mountain Company, which Captain Sublette still continued to control in a measure, the power still remained with them. The American Company had never been able to cope with them in the Rocky Mountains; and the St. Louis Company were already invading their territory on the Missouri River, by carrying goods up that river in boats, to trade with the Indians under the very walls of the American Company's forts.

In August of the previous year, when Mr. Nathaniel Wyeth had started on his return to the states, he was accompanied as far as the mouth of the Yellowstone by Milton Sublette; and had engaged with that gentleman to furnish him with goods the following year, as he believed he could do, cheaper than the St. Louis Company, who purchased their goods in St. Louis at a great advance on Boston prices. But Milton Sublette fell in with his brother the Captain, at the mouth of the Yellowstone, with a keel-boat loaded with merchandise; and while Wyeth pursued his way eastward to purchase the Indian goods which were intended to supply the wants of the fur-traders in the Rocky Mountains, at a profit to him, and an advantage to them, the Captain was persuading his brother not to encourage any interlopers in the Indian trade; but to continue to buy goods from himself, as formerly. So potent were his arguments, that Milton yielded to them, in spite of his engagement with Wyeth. Thus during the autumn of 1833, while Bonneville was being wronged and robbed, as he afterwards became convinced, by his men under Walker, and anticipated in the hunting-ground selected for himself, in the Crow country, by Fitzpatrick, as he had [Pg 163] previously been in the Snake country by Milton Sublette, Wyeth was proceeding to Boston in good faith, to execute what proved to be a fool's errand. Bonneville also had gone on another, when after the trapping season was over he left his camp to winter on the Snake River, and started with a small escort to visit the Columbia, and select a spot for a trading-post on the lower portion of that river. On arriving at Wallah-Wallah, after a hard journey over the Blue Mountains in the winter, the agent

at that post had refused to supply him with provisions to prosecute his journey, and given him to understand that the Hudson's Bay Company might be polite and hospitable to Captain Bonneville as the gentleman, but that it was against their regulations to encourage the advent of other traders who would interfere with their business, and unsettle the minds of the Indians in that region.

This reply so annoyed the Captain, that he refused the well meant advice of Mr. Pambrun that he should not undertake to recross the Blue Mountains in March snows, but travel under the escort of Mr. Payette, one of the Hudson's Bay Company's leaders, who was about starting for the Nez Perce country by a safer if more circuitous route. He therefore set out to return by the route he came, and only arrived at camp in May, 1834, after many dangers and difficulties. From the Portneuf River, he then proceeded with his camp to explore the Little Snake River, and Snake Lake; and it was while so doing that he fell in with his men just returned from Monterey.

Such was the relative position of the several fur companies in the Rocky Mountains in 1834; and it was of such matters that the leaders talked in the lodge of the Booshways, at rendezvous. In the meantime Wyeth arrived in the mountains with his [Pg 164] goods, as he had contracted with Milton Sublette in the previous year. But on his heels came Captain Sublette, also with goods, and the Rocky Mountain Company violated their contract with Wyeth, and purchased of their old leader.

Thus was Wyeth left, with his goods on his hands, in a country where it was impossible to sell them, and useless to undertake an opposition to the already established fur-traders and trappers. His indignation was great, and certainly was just. In his interview with the Rocky Mountain Company, in reply to their excuses for, and vindication of their conduct, his answer was:

"Gentlemen, I will roll a stone into your garden that you will never be able to get out."

And he kept his promise; for that same autumn he moved on to the Snake River, and built Fort Hall, storing his goods therein. The next year he sold out goods and fort to the Hudson's Bay Company; and the stone was in the garden of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company that they were never able to dislodge. When Wyeth had built his fort and left it in charge of an agent, he dispatched a party of trappers to hunt in the Big Blackfoot country, under Joseph Gale, who had previously been in the service of the Rocky Mountain Company, and of whom we shall learn more hereafter, while he set out for the Columbia to meet his vessel, and establish a salmon fishery. The fate of that enterprise has already been recorded.

As for Bonneville, he made one more effort to reach the lower Columbia; failing, however, a second time, for the same reason as before—he could not subsist himself and company in a country where even every Indian refused to sell to him either furs or provisions. After being reduced to horse-flesh, and finding no encouragement that his condition would be improved farther down the river, he turned back once more [Pg 165] from about Wallah-Wallah, and returned to the mountains, and from there to the east in the following year. A company of his trappers, however, continued to hunt for him east of the mountains for two or three years longer.

The rivalry between the Rocky Mountain and American Companies was this year diminished by their mutually agreeing to confine themselves to certain parts of the country, which treaty continued for two years, when they united in one company. They were then, with the exception of a few lone traders, the only competitors of the Hudson's Bay Company, for the fur-trade of the West.

VIEW ON THE COLUMBIA.

CHAPTER XI.

1834. The Rocky Mountain Company now confined themselves to the country lying east of the mountains, and upon the head-waters and tributaries of the Missouri, a country very productive in furs, and furnishing abundance of game. But it was also the most dangerous of all the northern fur-hunting territory, as it was the home of those two nations of desperadoes, the Crows and Blackfeet. During the two years in which the company may have been said almost to reside there, desperate encounters and hair-breadth escapes were incidents of daily occurrence to some of the numerous trapping parties.

The camp had reached the Blackfoot country in the autumn of this year, and the trappers were out in all directions, hunting beaver in the numerous small streams that flow into the Missouri. On a small branch of the Gallatin Fork, some of the trappers fell in with a party of Wyeth's men, under Joseph Gale. When their neighborhood became known to the Rocky Mountain camp, Meek and a party of sixteen of his associates immediately resolved to pay them a visit, and inquire into their experience since leaving rendezvous. These visits between different camps are usually seasons of great interest and general rejoicing. But glad as Gale and his men were to meet with old friends, when the first burst of hearty greeting was over, they had but a sorry experience to relate. They had been out a long time. The Blackfeet had used them badly—several men had been killed. Their guns were out of order, [Pg 167] their ammunition all but exhausted; they were destitute, or nearly so, of traps, blankets, knives, everything. They were what the Indian and the mountain-man call "very poor."

Half the night was spent in recounting all that had passed in both companies since the fall hunt began. Little sympathy did Wyeth's men receive for their forlorn condition, for sympathy is repudiated by your true mountaineer for himself, nor will he furnish it to others. The absurd and humorous, or the daring and reckless, side of a story is the only one which is dwelt upon in narrating his adventures. The laugh which is raised at his expense when he has a tale of woes to communicate, is a better tonic to his dejected spirits than the gentlest pity would be. Thus lashed into courage again, he is ready to declare that all his troubles were only so much pastime.

It was this sort of cheer which the trapping party conveyed to Wyeth's men on this visit, and it was gratefully received, as being of the true kind.

In the morning the party set out to return to camp, Meek and Liggit starting in advance of the others. They had not proceeded far when they were fired on by a large band of Blackfeet, who came upon them quite suddenly, and thinking these two trappers easy game, set up a yell and dashed at them. As Meek and Liggit turned back and ran to Gale's camp, the Indians in full chase charged on them, and rushed pell-mell into the midst of camp, almost before they had time to discover that they had surprised so large a party of whites. So sudden was their advent, that they had almost taken the camp before the whites could recover from the confusion of the charge.

It was but a momentary shock, however. In another instant the roar of twenty guns reverberated from the mountains that rose high on either side of camp. [Pg 168] The Blackfeet were taken in a snare; but they rallied and fell back beyond the grove in which the camp was situated, setting on fire the dry grass as they went. The fire quickly spread to the grove, and shot up the pine trees in splendid columns of flame, that seemed to lick the face of heaven. The Indians kept close behind the fire, shooting into camp whenever they could approach near enough, the trappers replying by frequent volleys. The yells of the savages, the noise of the flames roaring in the trees, the bellowing of the guns, whose echoes rolled among the hills, and the excitement of a battle for life, made the scene one long to be remembered with distinctness.

Both sides fought with desperation. The Blackfoot blood was up—the trapper blood no less. Gale's men, from having no ammunition, nor guns that were in order, could do little more than take charge of the horses, which they led out into the bottom land to escape the fire, fight the flames, and look after the camp goods. The few whose guns were available, showed the game spirit, and the fight became interesting as an exhibition of what mountain white men could do in a contest of one to ten, with the crack warriors of the red race. It was, at any time, a game party, consisting of Meek, Carson, Hawkins, Gale, Liggit, Rider, Robinson, Anderson, Russel, Larison, Ward, Parmaley, Wade, Michael Head, and a few others whose names have been forgotten.

The trappers being driven out of the grove by the fire, were forced to take to the open ground. The Indians, following the fire, had the advantage of the shelter afforded by the trees, and their shots made havoc among the horses, most of which were killed because they could not be taken. As for the trappers, they used the horses for defence, making rifle-pits behind them, when no other covert could be found. In this manner the battle was sustained until three o'clock in the afternoon, [Pg 169] without loss of life to the whites, though several men were wounded.

At three in the afternoon, the Blackfoot chief ordered a retreat, calling out to the trappers that they would fight no more. Though their loss had been heavy, they still

greatly outnumbered the whites; nor would the condition of the arms and the small amount of ammunition left permit the trappers to pursue them. The Indians were severely beaten, and no longer in a condition to fight, all of which was highly satisfactory to the victors. The only regret was, that Bridger's camp, which had become aware during the day that a battle was going on in the neighborhood, did not arrive early enough to exterminate the whole band. As it was, the big camp only came up in time to assist in taking care of the wounded. The destruction of their horses put an end to the independent existence of Gale's brigade, which joined itself and its fortunes to Bridger's command for the remainder of the year. Had it not been for the fortunate visit of the trappers to Gale's camp, without doubt every man in it would have perished at the hands of the Blackfeet: a piece of bad fortune not unaccordant with that which seemed to pursue the enterprises set on foot by the active but unlucky New England trader.

Not long after this battle with the Blackfeet, Meek and a trapper named Crow, with two Shawnees, went over into the Crow Country to trap on Pryor's River, a branch of the Yellowstone. On coming to the pass in the mountains between the Gallatin Fork of the Missouri and the great bend in the Yellowstone, called Pryor's Gap, Meek rode forward, with the mad-cap spirit strong in him, to "have a little fun with the boys," and advancing a short distance into the pass, wheeled suddenly, and came racing back, whooping and yelling, to make his comrades think he had discovered Indians. [Pg 170] And lo! as if his yells had invoked them from the rocks and trees, a war party suddenly emerged from the pass, on the heels of the jester, and what had been sport speedily became earnest, as the trappers turned their horses' heads and made off in the direction of camp. They had a fine race of it, and heard other yells and war-whoops besides their own; but they contrived to elude their pursuers, returning safe to camp.

This freak of Meek's was, after all, a fortunate inspiration, for had the four trappers entered the pass and come upon the war party of Crows, they would never have escaped alive.

A few days after, the same party set out again, and succeeded in reaching Pryor's River unmolested, and setting their traps. They remained some time in this neighborhood trapping, but the season had become pretty well advanced, and they were thinking of returning to camp for the winter. The Shawnees set out in one direction to take up their traps, Meek and Crow in another. The stream where their traps were set was bordered by thickets of willow, wild cherry, and plum trees, and the bank was about ten feet above the water at this season of the year.

Meek had his traps set in the stream about midway between two thickets. As he approached the river he observed with the quick eye of an experienced mountain-man, certain signs which gave him little satisfaction. The buffalo were moving off as if disturbed; a bear ran suddenly out of its covert among the willows.

"I told Crow," said Meek, "that I didn't like to go in there. He laughed at me, and called me a coward. 'All the same,' I said; I had no fancy for the place just then—I didn't like the indications. But he kept jeering me, and at last I got mad and started in. Just as I got to my traps, I discovered that two red devils war a watching me from [Pg 171] the shelter of the thicket to my left, about two rods off. When they saw that they war discovered they raised their guns and fired. I turned my horse's head at the same instant, and one ball passed through his neck, under the neck bone, and the other through his withers, just forward of my saddle.

"Seeing that they had not hit me, one of them ran up with a spear to spear me. My horse war rearing and pitching from the pain of his wounds, so that I could with difficulty govern him; but I had my gun laid across my arm, and when I fired I killed the rascal with the spear. Up to that moment I had supposed that them two war all I had to deal with. But as I got my horse turned round, with my arm raised to fire at the other red devil, I encountered the main party, forty-nine of them, who war in the bed of the stream, and had been covered by the bank. They fired a volley at me. Eleven balls passed through my blanket, under my arm, which war raised. I thought it time to run, and run I did. Crow war about two hundred yards off. So quick had all this happened, that he had not stirred from the spot whar I left him. When I came up to him I called out that I must get on behind him, for my horse war sick and staggering.

"'Try him again,' said Crow, who war as anxious to be off as I war. I did try him agin, and sure enough, he got up a gallop, and away we went, the Blackfeet after us. But being mounted, we had the advantage, and soon distanced them. Before we had run a mile, I had to dismount and breathe my horse. We war in a narrow pass whar it war impossible to hide, so when the Indians came up with us, as they did, while I war dismounted we took sure aim and killed the two foremost ones. Before the others could get close enough to fire we war off agin. It didn't take much urging to make my [Pg 172] horse go then, for the yells of them Blackfeet spurred him on.

"When we had run another mile I dismounted agin, for fear that my horse would give out, and agin we war overtaken. Them Blackfeet are powerful runners:—no better

than us mountain-men, though. This time we served them just as we did before. We picked off two of the foremost, and then went on, the rest whooping after us. We war overtaken a third time in the same manner; and the third time two Blackfeet fell dead in advance. At this, they took the hint. Six warriors already gone for two white scalps and two horses; they didn't know how many more would go in the same way. And I reckon they had run about all they wanted to, anyway."

It is only necessary to add that Meek and Crow arrived safely at camp; and that the Shawnees came in after a day or two all right. Soon after the whole command under Bridger moved on to the Yellowstone, and went into winter camp in the great bend of that river, where buffalo were plenty, and cotton-wood was in abundance.

1835. Towards spring, however, the game had nearly all disappeared from the neighborhood of the camp; and the hunters were forced to follow the buffalo in their migration eastward. On one of these expeditions a party of six trappers, including Meek, and a man named Rose, made their camp on Clarke's fork of the Yellowstone. The first night in camp Rose had a dream with which he was very much impressed. He dreamed of shaking hands with a large white bear, which insisted on taking his right hand for that friendly ceremony. He had not given it very willingly, for he knew too much about bears in general to desire to be on very intimate terms with them.

Seeing that the dream troubled Rose, who was superstitiously inclined, Meek resorted to that "certain medicine for minds diseased" which was in use in the [Pg 173] mountains, and added to the distress of Rose his interpretation, in the spirit of ridicule, telling him that he was an adept in the matter of dreams, and that unless he, Rose, was very mindful of himself that day, he would shake hands with Beelzebub before he slept again.

With this comforting assurance, Rose set out with the remainder of the party to hunt buffalo. They had proceeded about three miles from camp, Rose riding in advance, when they suddenly encountered a company of Blackfeet, nine in number, spies from a war party of one hundred and fifty, that was prowling and marauding through the country on the lookout for small parties from the camp of Bridger. The Blackfeet fired on the party as it came up, from their place of concealment, a ball striking Rose's right arm, and breaking it at the elbow. This caused his gun to fall, and an Indian sprang forward and raised it up quickly, aiming it at Meek. The ball passed through his cap without doing any other harm. By this time the trappers were made aware of an ambuscade; but how numerous the enemy was they could not determine. However, as the rest, who were well-mounted, turned to fly, Meek, who was riding an old mule that had to be beaten over the head to make it go, seeing that he was going to be left behind, called out lustily, "hold on, boys! There's not many of them. Let's stop and fight 'em;" at the same time pounding the mule over the head, but without effect. The Indians saw the predicament, and ran up to seize the mule by the bridle, but the moment the mule got wind of the savages, away he went, racing like a thoroughbred, jumping impediments, and running right over a ravine, which was fortunately filled with snow. This movement brought Meek out ahead.

The other men then began to call out to Meek to stop and fight. "Run for your lives, [Pg 174] boys," roared Meek back at them, "there's ten thousand of them; they'll kill every one of you!"

The mule had got his head, and there was no more stopping him than there had been starting him. On he went in the direction of the Yellowstone, while the others made for Clarke's Fork. On arriving at the former river, Meek found that some of the pack horses had followed him, and others the rest of the party. This had divided the Indians, three or four of whom were on his trail. Springing off his mule, he threw his blankets down on the ice, and by moving them alternately soon crossed the mule over to the opposite side, just in time to avoid a bullet that came whistling after him. As the Indians could not follow, he pursued his way to camp in safety, arriving late that evening. The main party were already in and expecting him. Soon after, the buffalo hunters returned to the big camp, minus some pack horses, but with a good story to tell, at the expense of Meek, and which he enjoys telling of himself to this day.

CHAPTER XII.

1835. Owing to the high rate of pay which Meek was now able to command, he began to think of imitating the example of that distinguished order, the free trappers, to which he now belonged, and setting up a lodge to himself as a family man. The writer of this veracious history has never been able to obtain a full and particular account of our hero's earliest love adventures. This is a subject on which, in common with most mountain-men, he observes a becoming reticence. But of one thing we feel quite well assured: that from the time when the young Shoshonie beauty assisted in the rescue of himself and Sublette from the execution of the death sentence at the hands of her

people, Meek had always cherished a rather more than friendly regard for the "Mountain Lamb."

THE FREE TRAPPER'S INDIAN WIFE.

But Sublette, with wealth and power, and the privileges of a Booshway, had hastened to secure her for himself; and Meek had to look and long from afar off, until, in the year of which we are writing, Milton Sublette was forced to leave the mountains and repair to an eastern city for surgical aid; having received a very troublesome wound in the leg, which was only cured at last by amputation.

Whether it was the act of a gay Lothario, or whether the law of divorce is even more easy in the mountains than in Indiana, we have always judiciously refrained from inquiring; but this we do know, upon the word of Meek himself, no sooner was Milton's back turned, than his friend so insinuated himself into the good graces of his [Pg 176] *Isabel*, as Sublette was wont to name the lovely Umentucken, that she consented to join her fortunes to those of the handsome young trapper without even the ceremony of serving a notice on her former lord. As their season of bliss only extended over one brief year, this chapter shall be entirely devoted to recording such facts as have been imparted to us concerning this free trapper's wife.

"She was the most beautiful Indian woman I ever saw," says Meek: "and when she was mounted on her dapple gray horse, which cost me three hundred dollars, she made a fine show. She wore a skirt of beautiful blue broadcloth, and a bodice and leggins of scarlet cloth, of the very finest make. Her hair was braided and fell over her shoulders, a scarlet silk handkerchief, tied on hood fashion, covered her head; and the finest embroidered moccasins her feet. She rode like all the Indian women, astride, and carried on one side of the saddle the tomahawk for war, and on the other the pipe of peace.

"The name of her horse was "All Fours." His accoutrements were as fine as his rider's. The saddle, crupper, and bust girths cost one hundred and fifty dollars; the bridle fifty dollars; and the musk-a-moots fifty dollars more. All these articles were ornamented with fine cut glass beads, porcupine quills, and hawk's bells, that tinkled at every step. Her blankets were of scarlet and blue, and of the finest quality. Such was the outfit of the trapper's wife, *Umentucken, Tukutey Undenwatsy*, the Lamb of the Mountains."

Although Umentucken was beautiful, and had a name signifying gentleness, she was not without a will and a spirit of her own, when the occasion demanded it. While the camp was on the Yellowstone River, in the summer of 1835, a party of women left it to go in search of berries, which were often dried and stored for winter use by the [Pg 177] Indian women. Umentucken accompanied this party, which was attacked by a band of Blackfeet, some of the squaws being taken prisoners. But Umentucken saved herself by flight, and by swimming the Yellowstone while a hundred guns were leveled on her, the bullets whistling about her ears.

At another time she distinguished herself in camp by a quarrel with one of the trappers, in which she came off with flying colors. The trapper was a big, bullying Irishman named O'Fallen, who had purchased two prisoners from the Snake Indians, to be kept in a state of slavery, after the manner of the savages. The prisoners were Utes, or Utahs, who soon contrived to escape. O'Fallen, imagining that Umentucken had liberated them, threatened to whip her, and armed himself with a horsewhip for that purpose. On hearing of these threats Umentucken repaired to her lodge, and also armed herself, but with a pistol. When O'Fallen approached, the whole camp looking on to see the event, Umentucken slipped out at the back of the lodge and coming around confronted him before he could enter.

"Coward!" she cried. "You would whip the wife of Meek. He is not here to defend me; not here to kill you. But I shall do that for myself," and with that she presented the

pistol to his head. O'Fallen taken by surprise, and having every reason to believe she would keep her word, and kill him on the spot, was obliged not only to apologize, but to beg to have his life spared. This Umentucken consented to do on condition of his sufficiently humbling himself, which he did in a very shame-faced manner; and a shout then went up from the whole camp—"hurrah for the Mountain Lamb!" for nothing more delights a mountaineer than a show of pluck, especially in an unlooked for quarter. [Pg 178]

The Indian wives of the trappers were often in great peril, as well as their lords. Whenever it was convenient they followed them on their long marches through dangerous countries. But if the trapper was only going out for a few days, or if the march before him was more than usually dangerous, the wife remained with the main camp.

During this year of which we are writing, a considerable party had been out on Powder River hunting buffalo, taking their wives along with them. When on the return, just before reaching camp, Umentucken was missed from the cavalcade. She had fallen behind, and been taken prisoner by a party of twelve Crow Indians. As soon as she was missed, a volunteer party mounted their buffalo horses in such haste that they waited not for saddle or bridle, but snatched only a halter, and started back in pursuit. They had not run a very long distance when they discovered poor Umentucken in the midst of her jubilant captors, who were delighting their eyes with gazing at her fine feathers, and promising themselves very soon to pluck the gay bird, and appropriate her trinkets to their own use.

Their delight was premature. Swift on their heels came an avenging, as well as a saving spirit. Meek, at the head of his six comrades, no sooner espied the drooping form of the Lamb, than he urged his horse to the top of its speed. The horse was a spirited creature, that seeing something wrong in all these hasty maneuvers, took fright and adding terror to good will, ran with the speed of madness right in amongst the startled Crows, who doubtless regarded as a great "medicine" so fearless a warrior. It was now too late to be prudent, and Meek began the battle by yelling and firing, taking care to hit his Indian. The other trappers, emulating the bold example of their leader, dashed into the melee and a chance medley fight was carried on, in which Umentucken escaped, and another Crow bit the dust. Finding that they were [Pg 179] getting the worst of the fight, the Indians at length took to flight, and the trappers returned to camp rejoicing, and complimenting Meek on his gallantry in attacking the Crows single-handed.

"I took their compliments quite naturally," says Meek, "nor did I think it war worth while to explain to them that I couldn't hold my horse."

The Indians are lordly and tyrannical in their treatment of women, thinking it no shame to beat them cruelly; even taking the liberty of striking other women than those belonging to their own families. While the camp was traveling through the Crow country in the spring of 1836, a party of that nation paid a visit to Bridger, bringing skins to trade for blankets and ammunition. The bargaining went on quite pleasantly for some time; but one of the braves who was promenading about camp inspecting whatever came in his way, chanced to strike Umentucken with a whip he carried in his hand, by way of displaying his superiority to squaws in general, and trappers' wives in particular. It was an unlucky blow for the brave, for in another instant he rolled on the ground, shot dead by a bullet from Meek's gun.

At this rash act the camp was in confusion. Yells from the Crows, who took the act as a signal for war; hasty questions, and cries of command; arming and shooting. It was some time before the case could be explained or understood. The Crows had two or three of their party shot; the whites also lost a man. After the unpremeditated fight was over, and the Crows departed not thoroughly satisfied with the explanation, Bridger went round to Meek's lodge.

"Well, you raised a hell of a row in camp;" said the commander, rolling out his deep bass voice in the slow monotonous tones which mountain men very quickly acquire [Pg 180] from the Indians.

"Very sorry, Bridger; but couldn't help it. No devil of an Indian shall strike Meek's wife."

"But you got a man killed."

"Sorry for the man; couldn't help it, though, Bridger."

And in truth it was too late to mend the matter. Fearing, however, that the Crows would attempt to avenge themselves for the losses they had sustained, Bridger hurried his camp forward, and got out of their neighborhood as quickly as possible.

So much for the female element in the camp of the Rocky Mountain trapper. Woman, it is said, has held the apple of discord, from mother Eve to Umentucken, and in consonance with this theory, Bridger, doubtless, considered the latter as the primal cause of the unfortunate "row in camp," rather than the brutality of the Crow, or the

imprudence of Meek.

But Umentucken's career was nearly run. In the following summer she met her death by a Bannack arrow; dying like a warrior, although living she was only a woman.

CHAPTER XIII.

1835. The rendezvous of the Rocky Mountain Company seldom took place without combining with its many wild elements, some other more civilized and refined. Artists, botanists, travelers, and hunters, from the busy world outside the wilderness, frequently claimed the companionship, if not the hospitality of the fur companies, in their wanderings over prairies and among mountains. Up to the year 1835, these visitors had been of the classes just named; men traveling either for the love of adventure, to prosecute discoveries in science, or to add to art the treasure of new scenes and subjects.

But in this year there appeared at rendezvous two gentlemen, who had accompanied the St. Louis Company in its outward trip to the mountains, whose object was not the procurement of pleasure, or the improvement of science. They had come to found missions among the Indians; the Rev. Samuel Parker and Rev. Dr. Marcus Whitman; the first a scholarly and fastidious man, and the other possessing all the boldness, energy, and contempt of fastidiousness, which would have made him as good a mountain leader, as he was an energetic servant of the American Board of Foreign Missions.

The cause which had brought these gentlemen to the wilderness was a little incident connected with the fur trade. Four Flathead Indians, in the year 1832, having heard enough of the Christian religion, from the few devout men connected with the fur companies, to desire to know more, performed a winter journey to St. Louis, and there made inquiry about the white man's religion. This incident, which to any one acquainted with Indian character, would appear a very natural one, when it became known to Christian churches in the United States, excited a very lively interest, and seemed to call upon them like a voice out of heaven, to fly to the rescue of perishing heathen souls. The Methodist Church was the first to respond. When Wyeth returned to the mountains in 1834, four missionaries accompanied him, destined for the valley of the Wallamet River in Oregon. In the following year, the Presbyterian Church sent out its agents, the two gentlemen above mentioned; one of whom, Dr. Whitman, subsequently located near Fort Walla-Walla.

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The account given by Capt. Bonneville of the Flatheads and Nez Perces, as he found them in 1832, before missionary labor had been among them, throws some light on the incident of the journey to St. Louis, which so touched the Christian heart in the United States. After relating his surprise at finding that the Nez Perces observed certain sacred days, he continues: "A few days afterwards, four of them signified that they were about to hunt. 'What!' exclaimed the captain, 'without guns or arrows; and with only one old spear? What do you expect to kill?' They smiled among themselves, but made no answer. Preparatory to the chase, they performed some religious rites, and offered up to the Great Spirit a few short prayers for safety and success; then having received the blessing of their wives, they leaped upon their horses and departed, leaving the whole party of Christian spectators amazed and rebuked by this lesson of faith and dependence on a supreme and benevolent Being. Accustomed as I had heretofore been to find the wretched Indian reveling in blood, and stained by every vice which can degrade human nature, I could scarcely realize the scene which I had witnessed. Wonder at such unaffected tenderness and piety, where it was least to have been sought, contended in all our bosoms with shame and confusion, at receiving such pure and wholesome instructions from creatures so far below us in all the arts and comforts of life.

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"Simply to call these people religious," continued Bonneville, "would convey but a faint idea of the deep hue of piety and devotion which pervades their whole conduct. Their honesty is immaculate, and their purity of purpose, and their observance of the rites of their religion, are most uniform and remarkable. They are certainly more like a nation of saints than a horde of savages."

This was a very enthusiastic view to take of the Nez Perce character, which appeared all the brighter to the Captain, by contrast with the savage life which he had witnessed in other places, and even by contrast with the conduct of the white trappers. But the Nez Perces and Flatheads were, intellectually and morally, an exception to all the Indian tribes west of the Missouri River. Lewis and Clarke found them different from any others; the fur-traders and the missionaries found them different; and they remain at this day an honorable example, for probity and piety, to both savage and civilized peoples.

To account for this superiority is indeed difficult. The only clue to the cause is in the following statement of Bonneville's. "It would appear," he says, "that they had

imbibed some notions of the Christian faith from Catholic missionaries and traders who had been among them. They even had a rude calender of the fasts and festivals of the Romish Church, and some traces of its ceremonials. These have become [Pg 184] blended with their own wild rites, and present a strange medley, civilized and barbarous."

Finding that these people among whom he was thrown exhibited such remarkable traits of character, Captain Bonneville exerted himself to make them acquainted with the history and spirit of Christianity. To these explanations they listened with great eagerness. "Many a time," he says, "was my little lodge thronged, or rather piled with hearers, for they lay on the ground, one leaning over the other, until there was no further room, all listening with greedy ears to the wonders which the Great Spirit had revealed to the white man. No other subject gave them half the satisfaction, or commanded half the attention; and but few scenes of my life remain so freshly on my memory, or are so pleasurably recalled to my contemplation, as these hours of intercourse with a distant and benighted race in the midst of the desert."

It was the interest awakened by these discourses of Captain Bonneville, and possibly by Smith, and other traders who happened to fall in with the Nez Perces and Flatheads, that stimulated those four Flatheads to undertake the journey to St. Louis in search of information; and this it was which resulted in the establishment of missions, both in western Oregon, and among the tribes inhabiting the country between the two great branches of the Columbia.

The trait of Indian character which Bonneville, in his pleased surprise at the apparent piety of the Nez Perces and Flatheads, failed to observe, and which the missionaries themselves for a long time remained oblivious to, was the material nature of their religious views. The Indian judges of all things by the material results. If he is possessed of a good natural intelligence and powers of observation, he soon discovers that the God of the Indian is but a feeble deity; for does he not permit the [Pg 185] Indian to be defeated in war; to starve, and to freeze? Do not the Indian medicine men often fail to save life, to win battles, to curse their enemies? The Indian's God, he argues, must be a good deal of a humbug. He sees the white men faring much better. They have guns, ammunition, blankets, knives, everything in plenty; and they are successful in war; are skillful in a thousand things the Indian knows nothing of. To be so blest implies a very wise and powerful Deity. To gain all these things they are eager to learn about the white man's God; are willing to do whatever is necessary to please and propitiate Him. Hence their attentiveness to the white man's discourse about his religion. Naturally enough they were struck with wonder at the doctrine of peace and good will; a doctrine so different from the law of blood by which the Indian, in his natural state, lives. Yet if it is good for the white men, it must be good for him; at all events he is anxious to try it.

That is the course of reasoning by which an Indian is led to inquire into Christianity. It is a desire to better his physical, rather than his spiritual condition; for of the latter he has but a very faint conception. He was accustomed to desire a material Heaven, such a world beyond the grave, as he could only imagine from his earthly experience. Heaven was happiness, and happiness was plenty; therefore the most a good Indian could desire was to go where there should forevermore be plenty.

Such was the Indian's view of religion, and it could be no other. Until the wants of the body have been supplied by civilization, the wants of the soul do not develop themselves: and until then the savage is not prepared to understand Christianity. This is the law of Nature and of God. Primeval man was a savage; and it was little by [Pg 186] little, through thousands of years, that Christ was revealed. Every child born, even now, is a savage, and has to be taught civilization year after year, until he arrives at the possibility of comprehending spiritual religion. So every full grown barbarian is a child in moral development; and to expect him to comprehend those mysteries over which the world has agonized for centuries, is to commit the gravest error. Into this error fell all the missionaries who came to the wilds that lay beyond the Rocky Mountains. They undertook to teach religion first, and more simple matters afterward—building their edifice like the Irishman's chimney, by holding up the top brick, and putting the others under it. Failure was the result of such a process, as the record of the Oregon Missions sufficiently proves.

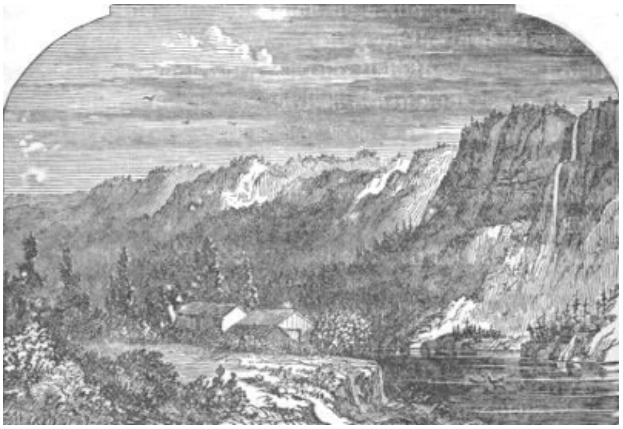
The reader will pardon this digression—made necessary by the part which one of the gentlemen present at this year's rendezvous, was destined to take in the history which we are writing. Shortly after the arrival of Messrs. Parker and Whitman, rendezvous broke up. A party, to which Meek was attached, moved in the direction of the Snake River head-waters, the missionaries accompanying them, and after making two camps, came on Saturday eve to Jackson's Little Hole, a small mountain valley near the larger one commonly known as Jackson's Hole.

On the following day religious services were held in the Rocky Mountain Camp. A scene more unusual could hardly have transpired than that of a company of trappers listening to the preaching of the Word of God. Very little pious reverence marked the countenances of that wild and motley congregation. Curiosity, incredulity, sarcasm,

or a mocking levity, were more plainly perceptible in the expression of the men's faces, than either devotion or the longing expectancy of men habitually deprived of what they once highly valued. The Indians alone showed by their eager listening that they desired to become acquainted with the mystery of the "Unknown God." [Pg 187]

The Rev. Samuel Parker preached, and the men were as politely attentive as it was in their reckless natures to be, until, in the midst of the discourse, a band of buffalo appeared in the valley, when the congregation incontinently broke up, without staying for a benediction, and every man made haste after his horse, gun, and rope, leaving Mr. Parker to discourse to vacant ground.

The run was both exciting and successful. About twenty fine buffaloes were killed, and the choice pieces brought to camp, cooked and eaten, amidst the merriment, mixed with something coarser, of the hunters. On this noisy rejoicing Mr. Parker looked with a sober aspect: and following the dictates of his religious feeling, he rebuked the sabbath-breakers quite severely. Better for his influence among the men, if he had not done so, or had not eaten so heartily of the tender-loin afterwards, a circumstance which his irreverent critics did not fail to remark, to his prejudice; and upon the principle that the "partaker is as bad as the thief," they set down his lecture on sabbath-breaking as nothing better than pious humbug.



VIEW ON THE COLUMBIA RIVER.

Dr. Marcus Whitman was another style of man. Whatever he thought of the wild ways of the mountain-men he discreetly kept to himself, preferring to teach by example rather than precept; and showing no fastidious contempt for any sort of rough duty he might be called upon to perform. So aptly indeed had he turned his hand to all manner of camp service on the journey to the mountains, that this abrogation of clerical dignity had become a source of solicitude, not to say disapproval and displeasure on the part of his colleague; and it was agreed between them that the Doctor should return to the states with the St. Louis Company, to procure recruits for the promising field of labor which they saw before them, while Mr. Parker continued his journey to the Columbia to decide upon the location of the missionary stations. The difference of character of the two men was clearly illustrated by the results of this understanding. Parker went to Vancouver, where he was hospitably entertained, and where he could inquire into the workings of the missionary system as pursued by the Methodist missionaries. His investigations not proving the labor to his taste, he sailed the following summer for the Sandwich Islands, and thence to New York; leaving only a brief note for Doctor Whitman, when he, with indefatigable exertions, arrived that season among the Nez Perces with a missionary company, eager for the work which they hoped to make as great as they believed it to be good. [Pg 188]

CHAPTER XIV.

From the mountains about the head-waters of the Snake River, Meek returned, with Bridger's brigade to the Yellowstone country, where he fell into the hands of the Crows. The story as he relates it, is as follows:

"I war trapping on the Rocky Fork of the Yellowstone. I had been out from camp five days; and war solitary and alone, when I war discovered by a war party of Crows. They had the prairie, and I war forced to run for the Creek bottom; but the beaver had throwed the water out and made dams, so that my mule mired down. While I war struggling in the marsh, the Indians came after me, with tremendous yells; firing a random shot now and then, as they closed in on me.

"When they war within about two rods of me, I brought old *Sally*, that is my gun, to my face, ready to fire, and then die; for I knew it war death this time, unless Providence interfered to save me: and I didn't think Providence would do it. But the

head chief, when he saw the warlike looks of *Sally*, called out to me to put down my gun, and I should live.

"Well, I liked to live,—being then in the prime of life; and though it hurt me powerful, I resolved to part with *Sally*. I laid her down. As I did so, the chief picked her up, and one of the braves sprang at me with a spear, and would have run me through, but the chief knocked him down with the butt of my gun. Then they led me forth to the high plain on the south side of the stream. There they called a halt, and I was given in [Pg 190] charge of three women, while the warriors formed a ring to smoke and consult. This gave me an opportunity to count them: they numbered one hundred and eighty-seven men, nine boys, and three women.

"After a smoke of three long hours, the chief, who war named 'The Bold,' called me in the ring, and said:

"'I have known the whites for a long time, and I know them to be great liars, deserving death; but if *you* will tell the truth, you shall live.'

"Then I thought to myself, they will fetch the truth out of me, if thar is any in me. But his highness continued:

"'Tell me whar are the whites you belong to; and what is your captain's name.'

"I said 'Bridger is my captain's name; or, in the Crow tongue, *Casapy*,' the 'Blanket chief.' At this answer the chief seemed lost in thought. At last he asked me—

"'How many men has he?'

"I thought about telling the truth and living; but I said 'forty,' which war a tremendous lie; for thar war two hundred and forty. At this answer The Bold laughed:

"'We will make them poor,' said he; 'and you shall live, but they shall die.'

"I thought to myself, 'hardly;' but I said nothing. He then asked me whar I war to meet the camp, and I told him:—and then how many days before the camp would be thar; which I answered truly, for I wanted them to find the camp.

"It war now late in the afternoon, and thar war a great bustle, getting ready for the march to meet Bridger. Two big Indians mounted my mule, but the women made me pack moccasins. The spies started first, and after awhile the main party. Seventy warriors traveled ahead of me: I war placed with the women and boys; and after us [Pg 191] the balance of the braves. As we traveled along, the women would prod me with sticks, and laugh, and say 'Masta Sheela,' (which means white man,) 'Masta sheela very poor now.' The fair sex war very much amused.

"We traveled that way till midnight, the two big bucks riding my mule, and I packing moccasins. Then we camped; the Indians in a ring, with me in the centre, to keep me safe. I didn't sleep very well that night. I'd a heap rather been in some other place.

"The next morning we started on in the same order as before: and the squaws making fun of me all day; but I kept mighty quiet. When we stopped to cook that evening, I war set to work, and war head cook, and head waiter too. The third and the fourth day it war the same. I felt pretty bad when we struck camp on the last day: for I knew we must be coming near to Bridger, and that if any thing should go wrong, my life would pay the forfeit.

"On the afternoon of the fourth day, the spies, who war in advance, looking out from a high hill, made a sign to the main party. In a moment all sat down. Directly they got another sign, and then they got up and moved on. I war as well up in Indian signs as they war; and I knew they had discovered white men. What war worse, I knew they would soon discover that I had been lying to them. All I had to do then war to trust to luck. Soon we came to the top of the hill, which overlooked the Yellowstone, from which I could see the plains below extending as far as the eye could reach, and about three miles off, the camp of my friends. My heart beat double quick about that time; and I once in a while put my hand to my head, to feel if my scalp war thar.

"While I war watching our camp, I discovered that the horse guard had seen us, for I knew the sign he would make if he discovered Indians. I thought the camp a splendid [Pg 192] sight that evening. It made a powerful show to me, who did not expect ever to see it after that day. And it *war* a fine sight any how, from the hill whar I stood. About two hundred and fifty men, and women and children in great numbers, and about a thousand horses and mules. Then the beautiful plain, and the sinking sun; and the herds of buffalo that could not be numbered; and the cedar hills, covered with elk,—I never saw so fine a sight as all that looked to me then!

"When I turned my eyes on that savage Crow band, and saw the chief standing with his hand on his mouth, lost in amazement; and beheld the warriors' tomahawks and spears glittering in the sun, my heart war very little. Directly the chief turned to me with a horrible scowl. Said he:

"'I promised that you should live if you told the truth; but you have told me a great

lie.'

"Then the warriors gathered around, with their tomahawks in their hands; but I war showing off very brave, and kept my eyes fixed on the horse-guard who war approaching the hill to drive in the horses. This drew the attention of the chief, and the warriors too. Seeing that the guard war within about two hundred yards of us, the chief turned to me and ordered me to tell him to come up. I pretended to do what he said; but instead of that I howled out to him to stay off, or he would be killed; and to tell Bridger to try to treat with them, and get me away.

"As quick as he could he ran to camp, and in a few minutes Bridger appeared, on his large white horse. He came up to within three hundred yards of us, and called out to me, asking who the Indians war. I answered 'Crows.' He then told me to say to the [Pg 193] chief he wished him to send one of his sub-chiefs to smoke with him.

"All this time my heart beat terribly hard. I don't know now why they didn't kill me at once; but the head chief seemed overcome with surprise. When I repeated to him what Bridger said, he reflected a moment, and then ordered the second chief, called Little-Gun, to go and smoke with Bridger. But they kept on preparing for war; getting on their paint and feathers, arranging their scalp locks, selecting their arrows, and getting their ammunition ready.

"While this war going on, Little-Gun had approached to within about a hundred yards of Bridger; when, according to the Crow laws of war, each war forced to strip himself, and proceed the remaining distance in a state of nudity, and kiss and embrace. While this interesting ceremony war being performed, five of Bridger's men had followed him, keeping in a ravine until they got within shooting distance, when they showed themselves, and cut off the return of Little-Gun, thus making a prisoner of him.

"If you think my heart did not jump up when I saw that, you think wrong. I knew it war kill or cure, now. Every Indian snatched a weapon, and fierce threats war howled against me. But all at once about a hundred of our trappers appeared on the scene. At the same time Bridger called to me, to tell me to propose to the chief to exchange me for Little-Gun. I explained to The Bold what Bridger wanted to do, and he sullenly consented: for, he said, he could not afford to give a chief for one white dog's scalp. I war then allowed to go towards my camp, and Little-Gun towards his; and the rescue I hardly hoped for war accomplished.

"In the evening the chief, with forty of his braves, visited Bridger and made a treaty [Pg 194] of three months. They said they war formerly at war with the whites; but that they desired to be friendly with them now, so that together they might fight the Blackfeet, who war everybody's enemies. As for me, they returned me my mule, gun, and beaver packs, and said my name should be *Shiam Shaspusia*, for I could out-lie the Crows."

In December, Bridger's command went into winter quarters in the bend of the Yellowstone. Buffalo, elk, and bear were in great abundance, all that fall and winter. Before they went to camp, Meek, Kit Carson, Hawkins, and Doughty were trapping together on the Yellowstone, about sixty miles below. They had made their temporary camp in the ruins of an old fort, the walls of which were about six feet high. One evening, after coming in from setting their traps, they discovered three large grizzly bears in the river bottom, not more than half a mile off, and Hawkins went out to shoot one. He was successful in killing one at the first shot, when the other two, taking fright, ran towards the fort. As they came near enough to show that they were likely to invade camp, Meek and Carson, not caring to have a bear fight, clambered up a cotton-wood tree close by, at the same time advising Doughty to do the same. But Doughty was tired, and lazy besides, and concluded to take his chances where he was; so he rolled himself in his blanket and laid quite still. The bears, on making the fort, reared up on their hind legs and looked in as if meditating taking it for a defence.

The sight of Doughty lying rolled in his blanket, and the monster grizzlys inspecting the fort, caused the two trappers who were safely perched in the cotton-wood to make merry at Doughty's expense; saying all the mirth-provoking things they could, and then advising him not to laugh, for fear the bears should seize him. Poor [Pg 195] Doughty, agonizing between suppressed laughter and growing fear, contrived to lie still however, while the bears gazed upward at the speakers in wonder, and alternately at the suspicious looking bundle inside the fort. Not being able to make out the meaning of either, they gave at last a grunt of dissatisfaction, and ran off into a thicket to consult over these strange appearances; leaving the trappers to enjoy the incident as a very good joke. For a long time after, Doughty was reminded how close to the ground he laid, when the grizzlys paid their compliments to him. Such were the every day incidents from which the mountain-men contrived to derive their rude jests, and laughter-provoking reminiscences.

A few days after this incident, while the same party were trapping a few miles farther down the river, on their way to camp, they fell in with some Delaware Indians, who

said they had discovered signs of Blackfeet, and wanted to borrow some horses to decoy them. To this the trappers very willingly agreed, and they were furnished with two horses. The Delawares then went to the spot where signs had been discovered, and tying the horses, laid flat down on the ground near them, concealed by the grass or willows. They had not long to wait before a Blackfoot was seen stealthily advancing through the thicket, confident in the belief that he should gain a couple of horses while their supposed owners were busy with their traps.

But just as he laid his hand on the bridle of the first one, crack went the rifles of the Delawares, and there was one less Blackfoot thief on the scent after trappers. As soon as they could, after this, the party mounted and rode to camp, not stopping by the way, lest the main body of Blackfeet should discover the deed and seek for vengeance. Truly indeed, was the Blackfoot the Ishmael of the wilderness, whose [Pg 196] hand was against every man, and every man's hand against him.

The Rocky Mountain Company passed the first part of the winter in peace and plenty in the Yellowstone camp, unannoyed either by enemies or rivals. Hunting buffalo, feeding their horses, playing games, and telling stories, occupied the entire leisure of these months of repose. Not only did the mountain-men recount their own adventures, but when these were exhausted, those whose memories served them rehearsed the tales they had read in their youth. Robinson Crusoe and the Arabian Nights Entertainment, were read over again by the light of memory; and even Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress was made to recite like a sensation novel, and was quite as well enjoyed.

1836. In January, however, this repose was broken in upon by a visit from the Blackfeet. As their visitations were never of a friendly character, so then they were not bent upon pacific rites and ceremonies, such as all the rest of the world find pleasure in, but came in full battle array to try their fortunes in war against the big camp of the whites. They had evidently made great preparation. Their warriors numbered eleven hundred, got up in the top of the Blackfoot fashions, and armed with all manner of savage and some civilized weapons. But Bridger was prepared for them, although their numbers were so overwhelming. He built a fort, had the animals corraled, and put himself on the defensive in a prompt and thorough manner. This made the Blackfeet cautious; they too built forts of cotton-wood in the shape of lodges, ten men to each fort, and carried on a skirmishing fight for two days, when finding there was nothing to be gained, they departed, neither side having sustained much loss; the whites losing only two men by this grand Blackfoot army. [Pg 197]

Soon after this attack Bridger broke camp, and traveled up the Yellowstone, through the Crow country. It was while on this march that Umentucken was struck by a Crow, and Meek put the whole camp in peril, by shooting him. They passed on to the Big Horn and Little Horn rivers, down through the Wind River valley and through the South Pass to Green River.

While in that country, there occurred the fight with the Bannacks in which Umentucken was killed. A small party of Nez Perces had lost their horses by the thieving of the Bannacks. They came into camp and complained to the whites, who promised them their protection, should they be able to recover their horses. Accordingly the Nez Perces started after the thieves, and by dogging their camp, succeeded in re-capturing their horses and getting back to Bridger's camp with them. In order to divert the vengeance of the Bannacks from themselves, they presented their horses to the whites, and a very fine one to Bridger.

All went well for a time. The Bannacks went on their way to hunt buffalo; but they treasured up their wrath against the supposed white thieves who had stolen the horses which they had come by so honestly. On their return from the hunt, having learned by spies that the horses were in the camp of the whites, they prepared for war. Early one morning they made their appearance mounted and armed, and making a dash at the camp, rode through it with the usual yells and frantic gestures. The attack was entirely unexpected. Bridger stood in front of his lodge, holding his horse by a lasso, and the head chief rode over it, jerking it out of his hand. At this unprecedented insult to his master, a negro named Jim, cook to the Booshways, seized a rifle and shot the chief dead. At the same time, an arrow shot at random struck Umentucken in the breast, and the joys and sorrows of the Mountain Lamb [Pg 198] were over forevermore.

The killing of a head chief always throws an Indian war party into confusion, and negro Jim was greatly elated at this signal feat of his. The trappers, who were as much surprised at the suddenness of the assault as it is in the mountain-man's nature to be, quickly recovered themselves. In a few moments the men were mounted and in motion, and the disordered Bannacks were obliged to fly towards their village, Bridger's company pursuing them.

All the rest of that day the trappers fought the Bannacks, driving them out of their village and plundering it, and forcing them to take refuge on an island in the river. Even there they were not safe, the guns of the mountain-men picking them off, from their stations on the river banks. Umentucken was well avenged that day.

All night the Indians remained on the island, where sounds of wailing were heard continually; and when morning came one of their old women appeared bearing the pipe of peace. "You have killed all our warriors," she said; "do you now want to kill the women? If you wish to smoke with women, I have the pipe."

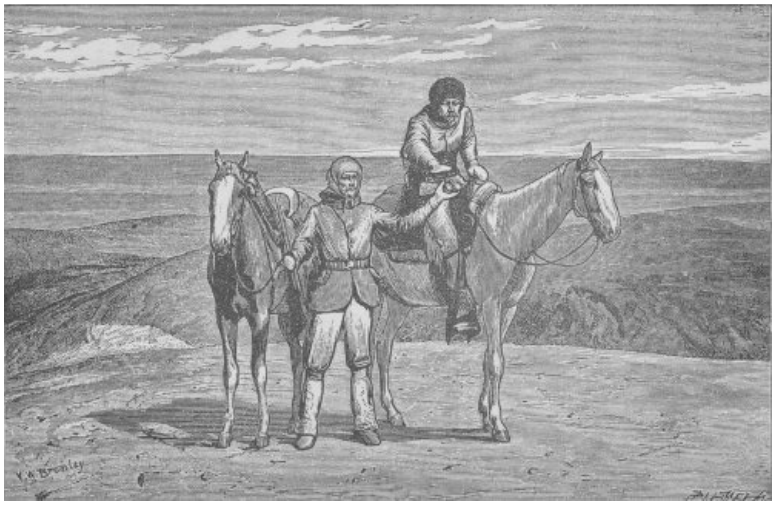
Not caring either to fight or to smoke with so feeble a representative of the Bannacks, the trappers withdrew. But it was the last war party that nation ever sent against the mountain-men; though in later times they have by their atrocities avenged the losses of that day.

While awaiting, in the Green River valley, the arrival of the St. Louis Company, the Rocky Mountain and North American companies united; after which Captain Sublette and his brother returned no more to the mountains. The new firm was known only as the American Fur Company, the other having dropped its title altogether. The object of their consolidation was by combining their capital and experience to strengthen [Pg 199] their hands against the Hudson's Bay Company, which now had an establishment at Fort Hall, on the Snake River. By this new arrangement, Bridger and Fontenelle commanded; and Dripps was to be the traveling partner who was to go to St. Louis for goods.

After the conclusion of this agreement, Dripps, with the restlessness of the true mountain-man, decided to set out, with a small party of equally restless trappers, always eager to volunteer for any undertaking promising either danger or diversion, to look for the St. Louis Company which was presumed to be somewhere between the Black Hills and Green River. According to this determination Dripps, Meek, Carson, Newell, a Flathead chief named Victor, and one or two others, set out on the search for the expected company.

It happened, however, that a war party of a hundred Crows were out on the trail before them, looking perhaps for the same party, and the trappers had not made more than one or two camps before they discovered signs which satisfied them of the neighborhood of an enemy. At their next camp on the Sandy, Meek and Carson, with the caution and vigilance peculiar to them, kept their saddles on their horses, and the horses tied to themselves by a long rope, so that on the least unusual motion of the animals they should be readily informed of the disturbance. Their precaution was not lost. Just after midnight had given place to the first faint kindling of dawn, their ears were stunned by the simultaneous discharge of a hundred guns, and the usual furious din of the war-whoop and yell. A stampede immediately took place of all the horses excepting those of Meek and Carson. "Every man for himself and God for us all," is the motto of the mountain-man in case of an Indian attack; nor did our trappers forget it on this occasion. Quickly mounting, they put their horses to their [Pg 200] speed, which was not checked until they had left the Sandy far behind them. Continuing on in the direction of the proposed meeting with the St. Louis Company, they made their first camp on the Sweetwater, where they fell in with Victor, the Flathead chief, who had made his way on foot to this place. One or two others came into camp that night, and the following day this portion of the party traveled on in company until within about five miles of Independence Rock, when they were once more charged on by the Indians, who surrounded them in such a manner that they were obliged to turn back to escape.

Again Meek and Carson made off, leaving their dismounted comrades to their own best devices. Finding that with so many Indians on the trail, and only two horses, there was little hope of being able to accomplish their journey, these two lucky ones made all haste back to camp. On Horse Creek, a few hours travel from rendezvous, they came up with Newell, who after losing his horse had fled in the direction of the main camp, but becoming bewildered had been roaming about until he was quite tired out, and on the point of giving up. But as if the Creek where he was found meant to justify itself for having so inharmonious a name, one of their own horses, which had escaped from the Crows was found quietly grazing on its banks, and the worn out fugitive at once remounted. Strange as it may appear, not one of the party was killed, the others returning to camp two days later than Meek and Carson, the worse for their expedition only by the loss of their horses, and rather an unusually fatigued and forlorn aspect.



"INDIANS BY JOVE!"

CHAPTER XV.

1836. While the resident partners of the consolidated company waited at the rendezvous for the arrival of the supply trains from St. Louis, word came by a messenger sent forward, that the American Company under Fitzpatrick, had reached Independence Rock, and was pressing forward. The messenger also brought the intelligence that two other parties were traveling in company with the fur company; that of Captain Stuart, who had been to New Orleans to winter, and that of Doctor Whitman, one of the missionaries who had visited the mountains the year previous. In this latter party, it was asserted, there were two white ladies.

This exhilarating news immediately inspired some of the trappers, foremost among whom was Meek, with a desire to be the first to meet and greet the on-coming caravan; and especially to salute the two white women who were bold enough to invade a mountain camp. In a very short time Meek, with half-a-dozen comrades, and ten or a dozen Nez Perces, were mounted and away, on their self-imposed errand of welcome; the trappers because they were "spoiling" for a fresh excitement; and the Nez Perces because the missionaries were bringing them information concerning the powerful and beneficent Deity of the white men. These latter also were charged with a letter to Doctor Whitman from his former associate, Mr. Parker.

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On the Sweetwater about two days' travel from camp the caravan of the advancing company was discovered, and the trappers prepared to give them a characteristic greeting. To prevent mistakes in recognizing them, a white flag was hoisted on one of their guns, and the word was given to start. Then over the brow of a hill they made their appearance, riding with that mad speed only an Indian or a trapper can ride, yelling, whooping, dashing forward with frantic and threatening gestures; their dress, noises, and motions, all so completely savage that the white men could not have been distinguished from the red.

The first effect of their onset was what they probably intended. The uninitiated travelers, including the missionaries, believing they were about to be attacked by Indians, prepared for defence, nor could be persuaded that the preparation was unnecessary until the guide pointed out to them the white flag in advance. At the assurance that the flag betokened friends, apprehension was changed to curiosity and intense interest. Every movement of the wild brigade became fascinating. On they came, riding faster and faster, yelling louder and louder, and gesticulating more and more madly, until, as they met and passed the caravan, they discharged their guns in one volley over the heads of the company, as a last finishing *feu de joie*; and suddenly wheeling rode back to the front as wildly as they had come. Nor could this first brief display content the crazy cavalcade. After reaching the front, they rode back and forth, and around and around the caravan, which had returned their salute, showing off their feats of horsemanship, and the knowing tricks of their horses together; hardly stopping to exchange questions and answers, but seeming really intoxicated with delight at the meeting. What strange emotions filled the breasts of the lady missionaries, when they beheld among whom their lot was cast, may now be faintly outlined by a vivid imagination, but have never been, perhaps never could be put into words.

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The caravan on leaving the settlements had consisted of nineteen laden carts, each drawn by two mules driven tandem, and one light wagon, belonging to the American Company; two wagons with two mules to each, belonging to Capt. Stuart; and one light two-horse wagon, and one four-horse freight wagon, belonging to the missionaries. However, all the wagons had been left behind at Fort Laramie, except

those of the missionaries, and one of Capt. Stuart's; so that the three that remained in the train when it reached the Sweetwater were alone in the enjoyment of the Nez Perces' curiosity concerning them; a curiosity which they divided between them and the domesticated cows and calves belonging to the missionaries: another proof, as they considered it, of the superior power of the white man's God, who could give to the whites the ability to tame wild animals to their uses.

But it was towards the two missionary ladies, Mrs. Whitman and Mrs. Spalding, that the chief interest was directed; an interest that was founded in the Indian mind upon wonder, admiration, and awe; and in the minds of the trappers upon the powerful recollections awakened by seeing in their midst two refined Christian women, with the complexion and dress of their own mothers and sisters. United to this startling effect of memory, was respect for the religious devotion which had inspired them to undertake the long and dangerous journey to the Rocky Mountains, and also a sentiment of pity for what they knew only too well yet remained to be encountered by those delicate women in the prosecution of their duty.

Mrs. Whitman, who was in fine health, rode the greater part of the journey on horseback. She was a large, stately, fair-skinned woman, with blue eyes and light [Pg 204] auburn, almost golden hair. Her manners were at once dignified and gracious. She was, both by nature and education a lady; and had a lady's appreciation of all that was courteous and refined; yet not without an element of romance and heroism in her disposition strong enough to have impelled her to undertake a missionary's life in the wilderness.

Mrs. Spalding was a different type of woman. Talented, and refined in her nature, she was less pleasing in exterior, and less attached to that which was superficially pleasing in others. But an indifference to outside appearances was in her case only a sign of her absorption in the work she had taken in hand. She possessed the true missionary spirit, and the talent to make it useful in an eminent degree; never thinking of herself, or the impression she made upon others; yet withal very firm and capable of command. Her health, which was always rather delicate, had suffered much from the fatigue of the journey, and the constant diet of fresh meat, and meat only, so that she was compelled at last to abandon horseback exercise, and to keep almost entirely to the light wagon of the missionaries.

As might be expected, the trappers turned from the contemplation of the pale, dark-haired occupant of the wagon, with all her humility and gentleness, to observe and admire the more striking figure, and more affably attractive manners of Mrs. Whitman. Meek, who never lost an opportunity to see and be seen, was seen riding alongside Mrs. Whitman, answering her curious inquiries, and entertaining her with stories of Blackfeet battles, and encounters with grizzly bears. Poor lady! could she have looked into the future about which she was then so curious, she would have turned back appalled, and have fled with frantic fear to the home of her grieving [Pg 205] parents. How could she then behold in the gay and boastful mountaineer, whose peculiarities of dress and speech so much diverted her, the very messenger who was to bear to the home of her girlhood the sickening tale of her bloody sacrifice to savage superstition and revenge? Yet so had fate decreed it.

When the trappers and Nez Perces had slaked their thirst for excitement by a few hours' travel in company with the Fur Company's and Missionary's caravan, they gave at length a parting display of horsemanship, and dashed off on the return trail to carry to camp the earliest news. It was on their arrival in camp that the Nez Perce and Flathead village, which had its encampment at the rendezvous ground on Green River, began to make preparations for the reception of the missionaries. It was then that Indian finery was in requisition! Then the Indian women combed and braided their long black hair, tying the plaits with gay-colored ribbons, and the Indian braves tied anew their streaming scalp-locks, sticking them full of flaunting eagle's plumes, and not despising a bit of ribbon either. Paint was in demand both for the rider and his horse. Gay blankets, red and blue, buckskin fringed shirts, worked with beads and porcupine quills, and handsomely embroidered moccasins, were eagerly sought after. Guns were cleaned and burnished, and drums and fifes put in tune.

After a day of toilsome preparation all was ready for the grand reception in the camp of the Nez Perces. Word was at length given that the caravan was in sight. There was a rush for horses, and in a few moments the Indians were mounted and in line, ready to charge on the advancing caravan. When the command of the chiefs was given to start, a simultaneous chorus of yells and whoops burst forth, accompanied by the deafening din of the war-drum, the discharge of fire-arms, and the clatter of the [Pg 206] whole cavalcade, which was at once in a mad gallop toward the on-coming train. Nor did the yelling, whooping, drumming, and firing cease until within a few yards of the train.

All this demoniac hub-bub was highly complimentary toward those for whom it was intended; but an unfortunate ignorance of Indian customs caused the missionaries to fail in appreciating the honor intended them. Instead of trying to reciprocate the noise by an attempt at imitating it, the missionary camp was alarmed at the first

burst and at once began to drive in their cattle and prepare for an attack. As the missionary party was in the rear of the train they succeeded in getting together their loose stock before the Nez Perces had an opportunity of making themselves known, so that the leaders of the Fur Company, and Captain Stuart, had the pleasure of a hearty laugh at their expense, for the fright they had received.

A general shaking of hands followed the abatement of the first surprise, the Indian women saluting Mrs. Whitman and Mrs. Spalding with a kiss, and the missionaries were escorted to their camping ground near the Nez Perce encampment. Here the whole village again formed in line, and a more formal introduction of the missionaries took place, after which they were permitted to go into camp.

When the intention of the Indians became known, Dr. Whitman, who was the leader of the missionary party, was boyishly delighted with the reception which had been given him. His frank, hearty, hopeful nature augured much good from the enthusiasm of the Indians. If his estimation of the native virtues of the savages was much too high, he suffered with those whom he caused to suffer for his belief, in the years which followed. Peace to the ashes of a good man! And honor to his associates, whose hearts were in the cause they had undertaken of Christianizing the Indians. [Pg 207] Two of them still live—one of whom, Mr. Spalding, has conscientiously labored and deeply suffered for the faith. Mr. Gray, who was an unmarried man, returned the following year to the States, for a wife, and settled for a time among the Indians, but finally abandoned the missionary service, and removed to the Wallamet valley. These five persons constituted the entire force of teachers who could be induced at that time to devote their lives to the instruction of the savages in the neighborhood of the Rocky Mountains.

The trappers, and gentlemen of the Fur Company and Captain Stuart, had been passive but interested spectators of the scene between the Indians and the missionaries. When the excitement had somewhat subsided, and the various camps had become settled in their places, the tents of the white ladies were besieged with visitors, both civilized and savage. These ladies, who were making an endeavor to acquire a knowledge of the Nez Perce tongue in order to commence their instructions in the language of the natives, could have made very little progress, had their purpose been less strong than it was. Mrs. Spalding perhaps succeeded better than Mrs. Whitman in the difficult study of the Indian dialect. She seemed to attract the natives about her by the ease and kindness of her manner, especially the native women, who, seeing she was an invalid, clung to her rather than to her more lofty and self-asserting associate.

On the contrary, the leaders of the American Fur Company, Captain Wyeth and Captain Stuart, paid Mrs. Whitman the most marked and courteous attentions. She shone the bright particular star of that Rocky Mountain encampment, softening the hearts and the manners of all who came within her womanly influence. Not a gentleman among them but felt her silent command upon him to be his better self [Pg 208] while she remained in his vicinity; not a trapper or camp-keeper but respected the presence of womanhood and piety. But while the leaders paid court to her, the bashful trappers contented themselves with promenading before her tent. Should they succeed in catching her eye, they never failed to touch their beaver-skin caps in their most studiously graceful manner, though that should prove so dubious as to bring a mischievous smile to the blue eyes of the observant lady.

But our friend Joe Meek did not belong by nature to the bashful brigade. He was not content with disporting himself in his best trapper's toggery in front of a lady's tent. He became a not infrequent visitor, and amused Mrs. Whitman with the best of his mountain adventures, related in his soft, slow, yet smooth and firm utterance, and with many a merry twinkle of his mirthful dark eyes. In more serious moments he spoke to her of the future, and of his determination, sometime, to "settle down." When she inquired if he had fixed upon any spot which in his imagination he could regard as "home" he replied that he could not content himself to return to civilized life, but thought that when he gave up "bar fighting and Injun fighting" he should go down to the Wallamet valley and see what sort of life he could make of it there. How he lived up to this determination will be seen hereafter.

The missionaries remained at the rendezvous long enough to recruit their own strength and that of their stock, and to restore to something like health the invalid Mrs. Spalding, who, on changing her diet to dried meat, which the resident partners were able to supply her, commenced rapidly to improve. Letters were written and given to Capt. Wyeth to carry home to the States. The Captain had completed his sale of Fort Hall and the goods it contained to the Hudson's Bay Company only a short [Pg 209] time previous, and was now about to abandon the effort to establish any enterprise either on the Columbia or in the Rocky Mountains. He had, however, executed his threat of the year previous, and punished the bad faith of the Rocky Mountain Company by placing them in direct competition with the Hudson's Bay Company.

The missionaries now prepared for their journey to the Columbia River. According to the advice of the mountain-men the heaviest wagon was left at the rendezvous,

together with every heavy article that could be dispensed with. But Dr. Whitman refused to leave the light wagon, although assured he would never be able to get it to the Columbia, nor even to the Snake River. The good Doctor had an immense fund of determination when there was an object to be gained or a principle involved. The only persons who did not oppose wagon transportation were the Indians. They sympathised with his determination, and gave him their assistance. The evidences of a different and higher civilization than they had ever seen were held in great reverence by them. The wagons, the domestic cattle, especially the cows and calves, were always objects of great interest with them. Therefore they freely gave their assistance, and a sufficient number remained behind to help the Doctor, while the main party of both missionaries and Indians, having bidden the Fur Company and others farewell, proceeded to join the camp of two Hudson's Bay traders a few miles on their way.

The two traders, whose camp they now joined, were named McLeod and McKay. The latter, Thomas McKay, was the half-breed son of that unfortunate McKay in Mr. Astor's service, who perished on board the *Tonquin*, as related in Irving's ASTORIA. He was one of the bravest and most skillful partisans in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company. McLeod had met the missionaries at the American rendezvous and invited them to travel in his company; an offer which they were glad to accept, as it secured them ample protection and other more trifling benefits, besides some society other than the Indians. [Pg 210]

By dint of great perseverance, Doctor Whitman contrived to keep up with the camp day after day, though often coming in very late and very weary, until the party arrived at Fort Hall. At the fort the baggage was again reduced as much as possible; and Doctor Whitman was compelled by the desertion of his teamster to take off two wheels of his wagon and transform it into a cart which could be more easily propelled in difficult places. With this he proceeded as far as the Boise River where the Hudson's Bay Company had a small fort or trading-post; but here again he was so strongly urged to relinquish the idea of taking his wagon to the Columbia, that after much discussion he consented to leave it at Fort Boise until some future time when unencumbered by goods or passengers he might return for it.

Arrived at the crossing of the Snake River, Mrs. Whitman and Mrs. Spalding were treated to a new mode of ferriage, which even in their varied experience they had never before met with. This new ferry was nothing more or less than a raft made of bundles of bulrushes woven together by grass ropes. Upon this frail flat-boat the passengers were obliged to stretch themselves at length while an Indian swam across and drew it after him by a rope. As the waters of the Snake River are rapid and often "dancing mad," it is easy to conjecture that the ladies were ill at ease on their bulrush ferry.

On went the party from the Snake River through the Grand Ronde to the Blue Mountains. The crossing here was somewhat difficult but accomplished in safety. The descent from the Blue Mountains on the west side gave the missionaries their first view of the country they had come to possess, and to civilize and Christianize. That view was beautiful and grand—as goodly a prospect as longing eyes ever beheld this side of Canaan. Before them lay a country spread out like a map, with the windings of its rivers marked by fringes of trees, and its boundaries fixed by mountain ranges above which towered the snowy peaks of Mt. Hood, Mt. Adams, and Mt. Rainier. Far away could be traced the course of the Columbia; and over all the magnificent scene glowed the red rays of sunset, tinging the distant blue of the mountains until they seemed shrouded in a veil of violet mist. It were not strange that with the reception given them by the Indians, and with this bird's-eye view of their adopted country, the hearts of the missionaries beat high with hope. [Pg 211]

The descent from the Blue Mountains brought the party out on the Umatilla River, where they camped, Mr. McLeod parting company with them at this place to hasten forward to Fort Walla-Walla, and prepare for their reception. After two more days of slow and toilsome travel with cattle whose feet were cut and sore from the sharp rocks of the mountains, the company arrived safely at Walla-Walla fort, on the third of September. Here they found Mr. McLeod, and Mr. Panbram who had charge of that post. [Pg 212]

DESCENDING THE BLUE MOUNTAINS.

Mr. Panbram received the missionary party with every token of respect, and of pleasure at seeing ladies among them. The kindest attentions were lavished upon them from the first moment of their arrival, when the ladies were lifted from their horses, to the time of their departure; the apartments belonging to the fort being assigned to them, and all that the place afforded of

comfortable living placed at their disposal. Here, for the first time in several months, they enjoyed the luxury of bread—a favor for which the suffering Mrs. Spalding was especially grateful.

At Walla-Walla the missionaries were informed that they were expected to visit Vancouver, the head-quarters of the Hudson's Bay Company on the Lower Columbia. After resting for two days, it was determined to make this visit before selecting places for mission work among the Indians. Accordingly the party embarked in the company's boats, for the voyage down the Columbia, which occupied six days, owing to strong head winds which were encountered at a point on the Lower Columbia, called Cape Horn. They arrived safely on the eleventh of September, at Vancouver, where they were again received with the warmest hospitality by the Governor, Dr. John McLaughlin, and his associates. The change from the privations of wilderness life to the luxuries of Fort Vancouver was very great indeed, and two weeks passed rapidly away in the enjoyment of refined society, and all the other elegancies of the highest civilization. [Pg 213]

At the end of two weeks, Dr. Whitman, Mr. Spalding, and Mr. Gray returned to the Upper Columbia, leaving the ladies at Fort Vancouver while they determined upon their several locations in the Indian country. After an absence of several weeks they returned, having made their selections, and on the third day of November the ladies once more embarked to ascend the Columbia, to take up their residence in Indian wigwams while their husbands prepared rude dwellings by the assistance of the natives. The spot fixed upon by Dr. Whitman for his mission was on the Walla-Walla River about thirty miles from the fort of that name. It was called *Waiilatpu*; and the tribe chosen for his pupils were the Cayuses, a hardy, active, intelligent race, rich in horses and pasture lands.

Mr. Spalding selected a home on the Clearwater River, among the Nez Perces, of whom we already know so much. His mission was called *Lapwai*. Mr. Gray went among the Flatheads, an equally friendly tribe; and here we shall leave the missionaries, to return to the Rocky Mountains and the life of the hunter and trapper. At a future date we shall fall in once more with these devoted people and learn what success attended their efforts to Christianize the Indians.

CHAPTER XVI.

1836. The company of men who went north this year under Bridger and Fontenelle, numbered nearly three hundred. Rendezvous with all its varied excitements being over, this important brigade commenced its march. According to custom, the trappers commenced business on the head-waters of various rivers, following them down as the early frosts of the mountains forced them to do, until finally they wintered in the plains, at the most favored spots they could find in which to subsist themselves and animals.

From Green River, Meek proceeded with Bridger's command to Lewis River, Salt River, and other tributaries of the Snake, and camped with them in Pierre's Hole, that favorite mountain valley which every year was visited by the different fur companies.

THE BEAR IN CAMP.

Pierre's Hole, notwithstanding its beauties, had some repulsive features, or rather perhaps *one* repulsive feature, which was, its great numbers of rattlesnakes. Meek relates that being once caught in a very violent thunder storm, he dismounted, and holding his horse, a fine one, by the bridle, himself took shelter under a narrow shelf of rock projecting from a precipitous bluff. Directly he observed an enormous

rattlesnake hastening close by him to its den in the mountain. Congratulating himself on his snake-ship's haste to get out of the storm and his vicinity, he had only time to have one rejoicing thought when two or three others followed the trail of the first [Pg 215] one. They were seeking the same rocky den, of whose proximity Meek now felt uncomfortably assured. Before these were out of sight, there came instead of twos and threes, tens and twenties, and then hundreds, and finally Meek believes thousands, the ground being literally alive with them. Not daring to stir after he discovered the nature of his situation, he was obliged to remain and endure the disgusting and frightful scene, while he exerted himself to keep his horse quiet, lest the reptiles should attack him. By and by, when there were no more to come, but all were safe in their holes in the rock, Meek hastily mounted and galloped in the face of the tempest in preference to remaining longer in so unpleasant a neighborhood.

There was an old Frenchman among the trappers who used to charm rattlesnakes, and handling them freely, place them in his bosom, or allow them to wind about his arms, several at a time, their flat heads extending in all directions, and their bodies waving in the air, in the most snaky and nerve-shaking manner, to the infinite disgust of all the camp, and of Hawkins and Meek in particular. Hawkins often became so nervous that he threatened to shoot the Frenchman on the instant, if he did not desist; and great was the dislike he entertained for what he termed the "—— infernal old wizard."

It was often the case in the mountains and on the plains that the camp was troubled with rattlesnakes, so that each man on laying down to sleep found it necessary to encircle his bed with a hair rope, thus effectually fencing out the reptiles, which are too fastidious and sensitive of touch to crawl over a hair rope. But for this precaution, the trapper must often have shared his blanket couch with this foe to the "seed of the woman," who being asleep would have neglected to "crush his head," receiving instead the serpent's fang in "his heel," if not in some nobler portion of his [Pg 216] body.

There is a common belief abroad that the prairie dog harbors the rattlesnake, and the owl also, in his subterranean house, in a more or less friendly manner. Meek, however, who has had many opportunities of observing the habits of these three ill-assorted denizens of a common abode, gives it as his opinion that the prairie dog consents to the invasion of his premises alone through his inability to prevent it. As these prairie dog villages are always found on the naked prairies, where there is neither rocky den for the rattlesnake, nor shade for the blinking eyes of the owl, these two idle and impudent foreigners, availing themselves of the labors of the industrious little animal which builds itself a cool shelter from the sun, and a safe one from the storm, whenever their own necessities drive them to seek refuge from either sun or storm, enter uninvited and take possession. It is probable also, that so far from being a welcome guest, the rattlesnake occasionally gorges himself with a young prairie-dog, when other game is not conveniently nigh, or that the owl lies in wait at the door of its borrowed-without-leave domicile, and succeeds in nabbing a careless field-mouse more easily than it could catch the same game by seeking it as an honest owl should do. The owl and the rattlesnake are like the Sioux when they go on a visit to the Omahas—the visit being always timed so as to be identical in date with that of the Government Agents who are distributing food and clothing. They are very good friends for the nonce, the poor Omahas not daring to be otherwise for fear of the ready vengeance on the next summer's buffalo hunt; therefore they conceal their grimaces and let the Sioux eat them up; and when summer comes get massacred on their buffalo hunt, all the same. [Pg 217]

But to return to our brigade. About the last of October Bridger's company moved down on to the Yellowstone by a circuitous route through the North Pass, now known as Hell Gate Pass, to Judith River, Mussel Shell River, Cross Creeks of the Yellowstone, Three Forks of Missouri, Missouri Lake, Beaver Head country, Big Horn River, and thence east again, and north again to the wintering ground in the great bend of the Yellowstone.

The company had not proceeded far in the Blackfeet country, between Hell Gate Pass and the Yellowstone, before they were attacked by the Blackfeet. On arriving at the Yellowstone they discovered a considerable encampment of the enemy on an island or bar in the river, and proceeded to open hostilities before the Indians should have discovered them. Making little forts of sticks or bushes, each man advanced cautiously to the bank overlooking the island, pushing his leafy fort before him as he crept silently nearer, until a position was reached whence firing could commence with effect. The first intimation the luckless savages had of the neighborhood of the whites was a volley of shots discharged into their camp, killing several of their number. But as this was their own mode of attack, no reflections were likely to be wasted upon the unfairness of the assault; quickly springing to their arms the firing was returned, and for several hours was kept up on both sides. At night the Indians stole off, having lost nearly thirty killed; nor did the trappers escape quite unhurt, three being killed and a few others wounded.

Since men were of such value to the fur companies, it would seem strange that they

should deliberately enter upon an Indian fight before being attacked. But unfortunate as these encounters really were, they knew of no other policy to be pursued. They, (the American Companies,) were not resident, with a long acquaintance, and settled [Pg 218] policy, such as rendered the Hudson's Bay Company so secure amongst the savages. They knew that among these unfriendly Indians, not to attack was to be attacked, and consequently little time was ever given for an Indian to discover his vicinity to a trapper. The trapper's shot informed him of that, and afterwards the race was to the swift, and the battle to the strong. Besides this acknowledged necessity for fighting whenever and wherever Indians were met with in the Blackfeet and Crow countries, almost every trapper had some private injury to avenge—some theft, or wound, or imprisonment, or at the very least, some terrible fright sustained at the hands of the universal foe. Therefore there was no reluctance to shoot into an Indian camp, provided the position of the man shooting was a safe one, or more defensible than that of the man shot at. Add to this that there was no law in the mountains, only license, it is easy to conjecture that might would have prevailed over right with far less incentive to the exercise of savage practices than actually did exist. Many a trapper undoubtedly shot his Indian "for the fun of it," feeling that it was much better to do so than run the risk of being shot at for no better reason. Of this class of reasoners, it must be admitted, Meek was one. Indian-fighting, like bear-fighting, had come to be a sort of pastime, in which he was proud to be known as highly accomplished. Having so many opportunities for the display of game qualities in encounters with these two by-no-means-to-be despised foes of the trapper, it was not often that they quarreled among themselves after the grand frolic of the rendezvous was over.

It happened, however, during this autumn, that while the main camp was in the valley of the Yellowstone, a party of eight trappers, including Meek and a comrade named Stanberry, were trapping together on the Mussel Shell, when the question as [Pg 219] to which was the bravest man got started between them, and at length, in the heat of controversy, assumed such importance that it was agreed to settle the matter on the following day according to the Virginia code of honor, *i.e.*, by fighting a duel, and shooting at each other with guns, which hitherto had only done execution on bears and Indians.

But some listening spirit of the woods determined to avert the danger from these two equally brave trappers, and save their ammunition for its legitimate use, by giving them occasion to prove their courage almost on the instant. While sitting around the camp-fire discussing the coming event of the duel at thirty paces, a huge bear, already wounded by a shot from the gun of their hunter who was out looking for game, came running furiously into camp, giving each man there a challenge to fight or fly.

"Now," spoke up one of the men quickly, "let Meek and Stanberry prove which is bravest, by fighting the bear!" "Agreed," cried the two as quickly, and both sprang with guns and wiping-sticks in hand, charging upon the infuriated beast as it reached the spot where they were awaiting it. Stanberry was a small man, and Meek a large one. Perhaps it was owing to this difference of stature that Meek was first to reach the bear as it advanced. Running up with reckless bravado Meek struck the creature two or three times over the head with his wiping-stick before aiming to fire, which however he did so quickly and so surely that the beast fell dead at his feet. This act settled the vexed question. Nobody was disposed to dispute the point of courage with a man who would stop to strike a grizzly before shooting him: therefore Meek was proclaimed by the common voice to be "cock of the walk" in that camp. The pipe of peace was solemnly smoked by himself and Stanberry, and the tomahawk buried never more to be resurrected between them, while a fat supper of bear meat [Pg 220] celebrated the compact of everlasting amity.

It was not an unfrequent occurrence for a grizzly bear to be run into camp by the hunters, in the Yellowstone country where this creature abounded. An amusing incident occurred not long after that just related, when the whole camp was at the Cross Creeks of the Yellowstone, on the south side of that river. The hunters were out, and had come upon two or three bears in a thicket. As these animals sometimes will do, they started off in a great fright, running toward camp, the hunters after them, yelling, frightening them still more. A runaway bear, like a runaway horse, appears not to see where it is going, but keeps right on its course no matter what dangers lie in advance. So one of these animals having got headed for the middle of the encampment, saw nothing of what lay in its way, but ran on and on, apparently taking note of nothing but the yells in pursuit. So sudden and unexpected was the charge which he made upon camp, that the Indian women, who were sitting on the ground engaged in some ornamental work, had no time to escape out of the way. One of them was thrown down and run over, and another was struck with such violence that she was thrown twenty feet from the spot where she was hastily attempting to rise. Other objects in camp were upset and thrown out of the way, but without causing so much merriment as the mishaps of the two women who were so rudely treated by the monster.

SATISFIED WITH BEAR FIGHTING.

It was also while the camp was at the Cross Creeks of the Yellowstone that Meek had one of his best fought battles with a grizzly bear. He was out with two companions, one Gardiner, and Mark Head, a Shawnee Indian. Seeing a very large bear digging roots in the creek bottom, Meek proposed to attack it, if the others would hold his [Pg 221] horse ready to mount if he failed to kill the creature. This being agreed to he advanced to within about forty paces of his game, when he raised his gun and attempted to fire, but the cap bursting he only roused the beast, which turned on him with a terrific noise between a snarl and a growl, showing some fearful looking teeth. Meek turned to run for his horse, at the same time trying to put a cap on his gun; but when he had almost reached his comrades, their horses and his own took fright at the bear now close on his heels, and ran, leaving him alone with the now fully infuriated beast. Just at the moment he succeeded in getting a cap on his gun, the teeth of the bear closed on his blanket capote which was belted around the waist, the suddenness and force of the seizure turning him around, as the skirt of his capote yielded to the strain and tore off at the belt. Being now nearly face to face with his foe, the intrepid trapper thrust his gun into the creature's mouth and attempted [Pg 222] again to fire, but the gun being double triggered and not set, it failed to go off. Perceiving the difficulty he managed to set the triggers with the gun still in the bear's mouth, yet no sooner was this done than the bear succeeded in knocking it out, and firing as it slipped out, it hit her too low down to inflict a fatal wound and only served to irritate her still farther.

In this desperate situation when Meek's brain was rapidly working on the problem of live Meek or live bear, two fresh actors appeared on the scene in the persons of two cubs, who seeing their mother in difficulty seemed desirous of doing something to assist her. Their appearance seemed to excite the bear to new exertions, for she made one desperate blow at Meek's empty gun with which he was defending himself, and knocked it out of his hands, and far down the bank or sloping hillside where the struggle was now going on. Then being partially blinded by rage, she seized one of her cubs and began to box it about in a most unmotherly fashion. This diversion gave Meek a chance to draw his knife from the scabbard, with which he endeavored to stab the bear behind the ear: but she was too quick for him, and with a blow struck it out of his hand, as she had the gun, nearly severing his forefinger.

At this critical juncture the second cub interfered, and got a boxing from the old bear, as the first one had done. This too, gave Meek time to make a movement, and loosening his tomahawk from his belt, he made one tremendous effort, taking deadly aim, and struck her just behind the ear, the tomahawk sinking into the brain, and his powerful antagonist lay dead before him. When the blow was struck he stood with his back against a little bluff of rock, beyond which it was impossible to retreat. It was his last chance, and his usual good fortune stood by him. When the struggle was over [Pg 223] the weary victor mounted the rock behind him and looked down upon his enemy slain; and "came to the conclusion that he was satisfied with bar-fighting."

But renown had sought him out even here, alone with his lifeless antagonist. Capt. Stuart with his artist, Mr. Miller, chanced upon this very spot, while yet the conqueror contemplated his slain enemy, and taking possession at once of the bear, whose skin was afterward preserved and stuffed, made a portrait of the "satisfied" slayer. A picture was subsequently painted by Miller of this scene, and was copied in wax for a museum in St. Louis, where it probably remains to this day, a monument of Meek's best bear fight. As for Meek's runaway horse and runaway comrades, they returned to the scene of action too late to be of the least service, except to furnish our hero with transportation to camp, which, considering the weight of his newly gathered laurels, was no light service after all.

In November Bridger's camp arrived at the Bighorn River, expecting to winter; but

finding the buffalo all gone, were obliged to cross the mountains lying between the Bighorn and Powder rivers to reach the buffalo country on the latter stream. The snow having already fallen quite deep on these mountains the crossing was attended with great difficulty; and many horses and mules were lost by sinking in the snow, or falling down precipices made slippery by the melting and freezing of the snow on the narrow ridges and rocky benches along which they were forced to travel.

About Christmas all the company went into winter-quarters on Powder River, in the neighborhood of a company of Bonneville's men, left under the command of Antoine Montero, who had established a trading-post and fort at this place, hoping, no doubt, [Pg 224] that here they should be comparatively safe from the injurious competition of the older companies. The appearance of three hundred men, who had the winter before them in which to do mischief, was therefore as unpleasant as it was unexpected; and the result proved that even Montero, who was Bonneville's experienced trader, could not hold his own against so numerous and expert a band of marauders as Bridger's men, assisted by the Crows, proved themselves to be; for by the return of spring Montero had very little remaining of the property belonging to the fort, nor anything to show for it. This mischievous war upon Bonneville was prompted partly by the usual desire to cripple a rival trader, which the leaders encouraged in their men; but in some individual instances far more by the desire for revenge upon Bonneville personally, on account of his censures passed upon the members of the Monterey expedition, and on the ways of mountain-men generally.

About the first of January, Fontenelle, with four men, and Captain Stuart's party, left camp to go to St. Louis for supplies. At Fort Laramie Fontenelle committed suicide, in a fit of *mania a potu*, and his men returned to camp with the news.

CHAPTER XVII.

1837. The fate of Fontenelle should have served as a warning to his associates and fellows. 'Should have done,' however, are often idle words, and as sad as they are idle; they match the poets 'might have been,' in their regretful impotency. Perhaps there never was a winter camp in the mountains more thoroughly demoralized than that of Bridger during the months of January and February. Added to the whites, who were reckless enough, were a considerable party of Delaware and Shawnee Indians, excellent allies, and skillful hunters and trappers, but having the Indian's love of strong drink. "Times were pretty good in the mountains," according to the mountain-man's notion of good times; that is to say, beaver was plenty, camp large, and alcohol abundant, if dear. Under these favorable circumstance much alcohol was consumed, and its influence was felt in the manners not only of the trappers, white and red, but also upon the neighboring Indians.

The Crows, who had for two years been on terms of a sort of semi-amity with the whites, found it to their interest to conciliate so powerful an enemy as the American Fur Company was now become, and made frequent visits to the camp, on which occasion they usually succeeded in obtaining a taste of the fire-water of which they were inordinately fond. Occasionally a trader was permitted to sell liquor to the whole village, when a scene took place whose peculiar horrors were wholly [Pg 226] indescribable, from the inability of language to convey an adequate idea of its hellish degradation. When a trader sold alcohol to a village it was understood both by himself and the Indians what was to follow. And to secure the trader against injury a certain number of warriors were selected out of the village to act as a police force, and to guard the trader during the 'drunk' from the insane passions of his customers. To the police not a drop was to be given.

This being arranged, and the village disarmed, the carousal began. Every individual, man, woman, and child, was permitted to become intoxicated. Every form of drunkenness, from the simple stupid to the silly, the heroic, the insane, the beastly, the murderous, displayed itself. The scenes which were then enacted beggared description, as they shocked the senses of even the hard-drinking, license-loving trappers who witnessed them. That they did not "point a moral" for these men, is the strangest part of the whole transaction.

When everybody, police excepted, was drunk as drunk could be, the trader began to dilute his alcohol with water, until finally his keg contained water only, slightly flavored by the washings of the keg, and as they continued to drink of it without detecting its weak quality, they finally drank themselves sober, and were able at last to sum up the cost of their intoxication. This was generally nothing less than the whole property of the village, added to which were not a few personal injuries, and usually a few murders. The village now being poor, the Indians were correspondingly humble; and were forced to begin a system of reprisal by stealing and making war, a course for which the traders were prepared, and which they avoided by leaving that neighborhood. Such were some of the sins and sorrows for which the American fur companies were answerable, and which detracted seriously from the respect that the [Pg 227]

courage, and other good qualities of the mountain-men freely commanded.

THE GAME OF CACHE.

By the first of March these scenes of wrong and riot were over, for that season at least, and camp commenced moving back toward the Blackfoot country. After recrossing the mountains, passing the Bighorn, Clarke's, and Rosebud rivers, they came upon a Blackfoot village on the Yellowstone, which as usual they attacked, and a battle ensued, in which Manhead, captain of the Delawares was killed, another Delaware named Tom Hill succeeding him in command. The fight did not result in any great loss or gain to either party. The camp of Bridger fought its way past the village, which was what they must do, in order to proceed.

Meek, however, was not quite satisfied with the punishment the Blackfeet had received for the killing of Manhead, who had been in the fight with him when the Camanches attacked them on the plains. Desirous of doing something on his own account, he induced a comrade named LeBlas, to accompany him to the village, after night had closed over the scene of the late contest. Stealing into the village with a noiselessness equal to that of one of Fennimore Cooper's Indian scouts, these two daring trappers crept so near that they could look into the lodges, and see the Indians at their favorite game of *Cache*. Inferring from this that the savages did not feel their losses very severely, they determined to leave some sign of their visit, and wound their enemy in his most sensitive part, the horse. Accordingly they cut the halters of a number of the animals, fastened in the customary manner to a stake, and succeeded in getting off with nine of them, which property they proceeded to appropriate to their own use. [Pg 228]

As the spring and summer advanced, Bridger's brigade advanced into the mountains, passing the Cross Creek of the Yellowstone, Twenty-five-Yard River, Cherry River, and coming on to the head-waters of the Missouri spent the early part of the summer in that locality. Between Gallatin and Madison forks the camp struck the great trail of the Blackfeet. Meek and Mark Head had fallen four or five days behind camp, and being on this trail felt a good deal of uneasiness. This feeling was not lessened by seeing, on coming to Madison Fork, the skeletons of two men tied to or suspended from trees, the flesh eaten off their bones. Concluding discretion to be the safest part of valor in this country, they concealed themselves by day and traveled by night, until camp was finally reached near Henry's Lake. On this march they forded a flooded river, on the back of the same mule, their traps placed on the other, and escaped from pursuit of a dozen yelling savages, who gazed after them in astonishment; "taking their mule," said Mark Head, "to be a beaver, and themselves great medicine men." "That," said Meek, "is what I call 'cooning' a river."

From this point Meek set out with a party of thirty or forty trappers to travel up the river to head-waters, accompanied by the famous Indian painter Stanley, whose party was met with, this spring, traveling among the mountains. The party of trappers were a day or two ahead of the main camp when they found themselves following close after the big Blackfoot village which had recently passed over the trail, as could be seen by the usual signs; and also by the dead bodies strewn along the trail, victims of that horrible scourge, the small pox. The village was evidently fleeing to the mountains, hoping to rid itself of the plague in their colder and more salubrious air.

Not long after coming upon these evidences of proximity to an enemy, a party of a hundred and fifty of their warriors were discovered encamped in a defile or narrow bottom enclosed by high bluffs, through which the trappers would have to pass. Seeing that in order to pass this war party, and the village, which was about half a mile in advance, there would have to be some fighting done, the trappers resolved to [Pg 229]

begin the battle at once by attacking their enemy, who was as yet ignorant of their neighborhood. In pursuance of this determination, Meek, Newell, Mansfield, and Le Blas, commenced hostilities. Leaving their horses in camp, they crawled along on the edge of the overhanging bluff until opposite to the encampment of Blackfeet, firing on them from the shelter of some bushes which grew among the rocks. But the Blackfeet, though ignorant of the number of their enemy, were not to be dislodged so easily, and after an hour or two of random shooting, contrived to scale the bluff at a point higher up, and to get upon a ridge of ground still higher than that occupied by the four trappers. This movement dislodged the latter, and they hastily retreated through the bushes and returned to camp.

The next day, the main camp having come up, the fight was renewed. While the greater body of the company, with the pack-horses, were passing along the high bluff overhanging them, the party of the day before, and forty or fifty others, undertook to drive the Indians out of the bottom, and by keeping them engaged allow the train to pass in safety. The trappers rode to the fight on this occasion, and charged the Blackfeet furiously, they having joined the village a little farther on. A general skirmish now took place. Meek, who was mounted on a fine horse, was in the thickest of the fight. He had at one time a side to side race with an Indian who strung his bow so hard that the arrow dropped, just as Meek, who had loaded his gun running, was ready to fire, and the Indian dropped after his arrow. [Pg 230]

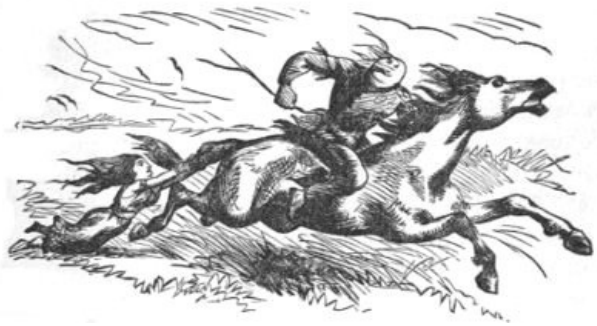
Newell too had a desperate conflict with a half-dead warrior, who having fallen from a wound, he thought dead and was trying to scalp. Springing from his horse he seized the Indian's long thick hair in one hand, and with his knife held in the other made a pass at the scalp, when the savage roused up knife in hand, and a struggle took place in which it was for a time doubtful which of the combatants would part with the coveted scalp-lock. Newell might have been glad to resign the trophy, and leave the fallen warrior his tuft of hair, but his fingers were in some way caught by some gun-screws with which the savage had ornamented his *coiffure*, and would not part company. In this dilemma there was no other alternative but fight. The miserable savage was dragged a rod or two in the struggle, and finally dispatched.

Mansfield also got into such close quarters, surrounded by the enemy, that he gave himself up for lost, and called out to his comrades: "Tell old Gabe, (Bridger,) that old Cotton (his own sobriquet) is gone." He lived, however, to deliver his own farewell message, for at this critical juncture the trappers were re-inforced, and relieved. Still the fight went on, the trappers gradually working their way to the upper end of the enclosed part of the valley, past the point of danger.

Just before getting clear of this entanglement Meek became the subject of another picture, by Stanley, who was viewing the battle from the heights above the valley. The picture which is well known as "The Trapper's Last Shot," represents him as he turned upon his horse, a fine and spirited animal, to discharge his last shot at an Indian pursuing, while in the bottom, at a little distance away, other Indians are seen skulking in the tall reedy grass. [Pg 231]

THE TRAPPER'S LAST SHOT.

The last shot having been discharged with fatal effect, our trapper, so persistently lionized by painters, put his horse to his utmost speed and soon after overtook the camp, which had now passed the strait of danger. But the Blackfeet were still unsatisfied with the result of the contest. They followed after, reinforced from the village, and attacked the camp. In the fight which followed a Blackfoot woman's horse was shot down, and Meek tried to take her prisoner: but two or three of her people coming to the rescue, engaged his attention; and the woman was saved by seizing hold of the tail of her husband's horse, which setting off at a run, carried her out of danger.



"AND THEREBY HANGS A TAIL."

The Blackfeet found the camp of Bridger too strong for them. They were severely beaten and compelled to retire to their village, leaving Bridger free to move on. The following day the camp reached the village of Little-Robe, a chief of the Peagans, who held a talk with Bridger, complaining that his nation were all perishing from the [Pg 232] small-pox which had been given to them by the whites. Bridger was able to explain to Little-Robe his error; inasmuch as although the disease might have originated among the whites, it was communicated to the Blackfeet by Jim Beckwith, a negro, and principal chief of their enemies the Crows. This unscrupulous wretch had caused two infected articles to be taken from a Mackinaw boat, up from St. Louis, and disposed of to the Blackfeet—whence the horrible scourge under which they were suffering.

This matter being explained, Little-Robe consented to trade horses and skins; and the two camps parted amicably. The next day after this friendly talk, Bridger being encamped on the trail in advance of the Blackfeet, an Indian came riding into camp, with his wife and daughter, pack-horse and lodge-pole, and all his worldly goods, unaware until he got there of the snare into which he had fallen. The French trappers, generally, decreed to kill the man and take possession of the woman. But Meek, Kit Carson, and others of the American trappers of the better sort, interfered to prevent this truly savage act. Meek took the woman's horse by the head, Carson the man's, the daughter following, and led them out of camp. Few of the Frenchmen cared to interrupt either of these two men, and they were suffered to depart in peace. When at a safe distance, Meek stopped, and demanded as some return for having saved the man's life, a present of tobacco, a luxury which, from the Indian's pipe, he suspected him to possess. About enough for two chews was the result of this demand, complied with rather grudgingly, the Indian vieing with the trapper in his devotion to the weed. Just at this time, owing to the death of Fontenelle, and a [Pg 233] consequent delay in receiving supplies, tobacco was scarce among the mountaineers.

Bridger's brigade of trappers met with no other serious interruptions on their summer's march. They proceeded to Henry's Lake, and crossing the Rocky Mountains, traveled through the Pine Woods, always a favorite region, to Lewis' Lake on Lewis' Fork of the Snake River; and finally up the Grovant Fork, recrossing the mountains to Wind River, where the rendezvous for this year was appointed.

Here, once more, the camp was visited by a last years' acquaintance. This was none other than Mr. Gray, of the Flathead Mission, who was returning to the States on business connected with the missionary enterprise, and to provide himself with a helpmeet for life,—a co-laborer and sufferer in the contemplated toil of teaching savages the rudiments of a religion difficult even to the comprehension of an old civilization.

Mr. Gray was accompanied by two young men (whites) who wished to return to the States, and also by a son of one of the Flathead chiefs. Two other Flathead Indians, and one Iroquois and one Snake Indian, were induced to accompany Mr. Gray. The undertaking was not without danger, and so the leaders of the Fur Company assured him. But Mr. Gray was inclined to make light of the danger, having traveled with entire safety when under the protection of the Fur Companies the year before. He proceeded without interruption until he reached Ash Hollow, in the neighborhood of Fort Laramie, when his party was attacked by a large band of Sioux, and compelled to accept battle. The five Indians, with the whites, fought bravely, killing fifteen of the Sioux, before a parley was obtained by the intervention of a French trader who [Pg 234] chanced to be among the Sioux. When Mr. Gray was able to hold a 'talk' with the attacking party he was assured that his life and that of his two white associates would be spared, but that they wanted to kill the strange Indians and take their fine horses. It is not at all probable that Mr. Gray consented to this sacrifice; though he has been accused of doing so.

No doubt the Sioux took advantage of some hesitation on his part, and rushed upon his Indian allies in an unguarded moment. However that may be, his allies were killed and he was allowed to escape, after giving up the property belonging to them, and a portion of his own.

This affair was the occasion of much ill-feeling toward Mr. Gray, when, in the

following year, he returned to the mountains with the tale of massacre of his friends and his own escape. The mountain-men, although they used their influence to restrain the vengeful feelings of the Flathead tribe, whispered amongst themselves that Gray had preferred his own life to that of his friends. The old Flathead chief too, who had lost a son by the massacre, was hardly able to check his impulsive desire for revenge; for he held Mr. Gray responsible for his son's life. Nothing more serious, however, grew out of this unhappy tragedy than a disaffection among the tribe toward Mr. Gray, which made his labors useless, and finally determined him to remove to the Wallamet Valley.

There were no outsiders besides Gray's party at the rendezvous of this year, except Captain Stuart, and he was almost as good a mountaineer as any. This doughty English traveler had the bad fortune together with that experienced leader Fitzpatrick, of being robbed by the Crows in the course of the fall hunt, in the Crow country. These expert horse thieves had succeeded in stealing nearly all the horses [Pg 235] belonging to the joint camp, and had so disabled the company that it could not proceed. In this emergency, Newell, who had long been a sub-trader and was wise in Indian arts and wiles, was sent to hold a talk with the thieves. The talk was held, according to custom, in the Medicine lodge, and the usual amount of smoking, of long silences, and grave looks, had to be participated in, before the subject on hand could be considered. Then the chiefs complained as usual of wrongs at the hands of the white men; of their fear of small-pox, from which some of their tribe had suffered; of friends killed in battle with the whites, and all the list of ills that Crow flesh is heir to at the will of their white enemies. The women too had their complaints to proffer, and the number of widows and orphans in the tribe was pathetically set forth. The chiefs also made a strong point of this latter complaint; and on it the wily Newell hung his hopes of recovering the stolen property.

"It is true," said he to the chiefs, "that you have sustained heavy losses. But that is not the fault of the Blanket chief (Bridger.) If your young men have been killed, they were killed when attempting to rob or kill our Captain's men. If you have lost horses, your young men have stolen five to our one. If you are poor in skins and other property, it is because you sold it all for drink which did you no good. Neither is Bridger to blame that you have had the small-pox. Your own chief, in trying to kill your enemies the Blackfeet, brought that disease into the country.

"But it is true that you have many widows and orphans to support, and that is bad. I pity the orphans, and will help you to support them, if you will restore to my captain the property stolen from his camp. Otherwise Bridger will bring more horses, and plenty of ammunition, and there will be more widows and orphans among the Crows [Pg 236] than ever before."

This was a kind of logic easy to understand and quick to convince among savages. The bribe, backed by a threat, settled the question of the restoration of the horses, which were returned without further delay, and a present of blankets and trinkets was given, ostensibly to the bereaved women, really to the covetous chiefs.

CHAPTER XVIII.

1837. The decline of the business of hunting furs began to be quite obvious about this time. Besides the American and St. Louis Companies, and the Hudson's Bay Company, there were numerous lone traders with whom the ground was divided. The autumn of this year was spent by the American Company, as formerly, in trapping beaver on the streams issuing from the eastern side of the Rocky Mountains. When the cold weather finally drove the Fur Company to the plains, they went into winter quarters once more in the neighborhood of the Crows on Powder River. Here were re-enacted the wild scenes of the previous winter, both trappers and Indians being given up to excesses.

On the return of spring, Bridger again led his brigade all through the Yellowstone country, to the streams on the north side of the Missouri, to the head-waters of that river; and finally rendezvoused on the north fork of the Yellowstone, near Yellowstone Lake. Though the amount of furs taken on the spring hunt was considerable, it was by no means equal to former years. The fact was becoming apparent that the beaver was being rapidly exterminated.

However there was beaver enough in camp to furnish the means for the usual profligacy. Horse-racing, betting, gambling, drinking, were freely indulged in. In the midst of this "fun," there appeared at the rendezvous Mr. Gray, now accompanied by [Pg 238] Mrs. Gray and six other missionary ladies and gentlemen. Here also were two gentlemen from the Methodist mission on the Wallamet, who were returning to the States. Captain Stuart was still traveling with the Fur Company, and was also present with his party; besides which a Hudson's Bay trader named Ematinger was encamped near by. As if actuated to extraordinary displays by the unusual number of

visitors, especially the four ladies, both trappers and Indians conducted themselves like the mad-caps they were. The Shawnees and Delawares danced their great war-dance before the tents of the missionaries; and Joe Meek, not to be outdone, arrayed himself in a suit of armor belonging to Captain Stuart and strutted about the encampment; then mounting his horse played the part of an ancient knight, with a good deal of *eclat*.

Meek had not abstained from the alcohol kettle, but had offered it and partaken of it rather more freely than usual; so that when rendezvous was broken up, the St. Louis Company gone to the Popo Agie, and the American Company going to Wind River, he found that his wife, a Nez Perce who had succeeded Umentucken in his affections, had taken offence, or a fit of homesickness, which was synonymous, and departed with the party of Ematinger and the missionaries, intending to visit her people at Walla-Walla. This desertion wounded Meek's feelings; for he prided himself on his courtesy to the sex, and did not like to think that he had not behaved handsomely. All the more was he vexed with himself because his spouse had carried with her a pretty and sprightly baby-daughter, of whom the father was fond and proud, and who had been christened Helen Mar, after one of the heroines of Miss Porter's *Scottish Chiefs* —a book much admired in the mountains, as it has been elsewhere. [Pg 239]

Therefore at the first camp of the American Company, Meek resolved to turn his back on the company, and go after the mother and daughter. Obtaining a fresh kettle of alcohol, to keep up his spirits, he left camp, returning toward the scene of the late rendezvous. But in the effort to keep up his spirits he had drank too much alcohol, and the result was that on the next morning he found himself alone on the Wind River Mountain, with his horses and pack mules, and very sick indeed. Taking a little more alcohol to brace up his nerves, he started on again, passing around the mountain on to the Sweetwater; thence to the Sandy, and thence across a country without water for seventy-five miles, to Green River, where the camp of Ematinger was overtaken.

The heat was excessive; and the absence of water made the journey across the arid plain between Sandy and Green Rivers one of great suffering to the traveler and his animals; and the more so as the frequent references to the alcohol kettle only increased the thirst-fever instead of allaying it. But Meek was not alone in suffering. About half way across the scorching plain he discovered a solitary woman's figure standing in the trail, and two riding horses near her, whose drooping heads expressed their dejection. On coming up with this strange group, Meek found the woman to be one of the missionary ladies, a Mrs. Smith, and that her husband was lying on the ground, dying, as the poor sufferer believed himself, for water.

Mrs. Smith made a weeping appeal to Meek for water for her dying husband; and truly the poor woman's situation was a pitiable one. Behind camp, with no protection from the perils of the desert and wilderness—only a terrible care instead—the necessity of trying to save her husband's life. As no water was to be had, alcohol was [Pg 240] offered to the famishing man, who, however, could not be aroused from his stupor of wretchedness. Seeing that death really awaited the unlucky missionary unless something could be done to cause him to exert himself, Meek commenced at once, and with unction, to abuse the man for his unmanliness. His style, though not very refined, was certainly very vigorous.

"You're a —— pretty fellow to be lying on the ground here, lolling your tongue out of your mouth, and trying to die. Die, if you want to, you're of no account and will never be missed. Here's your wife, who you are keeping standing here in the hot sun; why don't *she* die? She's got more pluck than a white-livered chap like you. But I'm not going to leave her waiting here for you to die. Thar's a band of Indians behind on the trail, and I've been riding like —— to keep out of their way. If you want to stay here and be scalped, you can stay; Mrs. Smith is going with me. Come, madam," continued Meek, leading up her horse, "let me help you to mount, for we must get out of this cursed country as fast as possible."

Poor Mrs. Smith did not wish to leave her husband; nor did she relish the notion of staying to be scalped. Despair tugged at her heart-strings. She would have sunk to the ground in a passion of tears, but Meek was too much in earnest to permit precious time to be thus wasted. "Get on your horse," said he rather roughly. "You can't save your husband by staying here, crying. It is better that one should die than two; and he seems to be a worthless dog anyway. Let the Indians have him."

Almost lifting her upon the horse, Meek tore the distracted woman away from her husband, who had yet strength enough to gasp out an entreaty not to be left. [Pg 241]

"You can follow us if you choose," said the apparently merciless trapper, "or you can stay where you are. Mrs. Smith can find plenty of better men than you. Come, madam!" and he gave the horse a stroke with his riding-whip which started him into a rapid pace.

The unhappy wife, whose conscience reproached her for leaving her husband to die alone, looked back, and saw him raising his head to gaze after them. Her grief broke

out afresh, and she would have gone back even then to remain with him: but Meek was firm, and again started up her horse. Before they were quite out of sight, Meek turned in his saddle, and beheld the dying man sitting up. "Hurrah;" said he: "he's all right. He will overtake us in a little while:" and as he predicted, in little over an hour Smith came riding up, not more than half dead by this time. The party got into camp on Green River, about eleven o'clock that night, and Mrs. Smith having told the story of her adventures with the unknown trapper who had so nearly kidnaped her, the laugh and the cheer went round among the company. "That's Meek," said Ematinger, "you may rely on that. He's just the one to kidnap a woman in that way." When Mrs. Smith fully realized the service rendered, she was abundantly grateful, and profuse were the thanks which our trapper received, even from the much-abused husband, who was now thoroughly alive again. Meek failed to persuade his wife to return with him. She was homesick for her people, and would go to them. But instead of turning back, he kept on with Ematinger's camp as far as Fort Hall, which post was then in charge of Courtenay Walker.

While the camp was at Soda Springs, Meek observed the missionary ladies baking bread in a tin reflector before a fire. Bread was a luxury unknown to the mountain-man,—and as a sudden recollection of his boyhood, and the days of bread- [Pg 242] and-butter came over him, his mouth began to water. Almost against his will he continued to hang round the missionary camp, thinking about the bread. At length one of the Nez Perces, named James, whom the missionary had taught to sing, at their request struck up a hymn, which he sang in a very creditable manner. As a reward of his pious proficiency, one of the ladies gave James a biscuit. A bright thought struck our longing hero's brain. "Go back," said he to James, "and sing another hymn; and when the ladies give you another biscuit, bring it to me." And in this manner, he obtained a taste of the coveted luxury, bread—of which, during nine years in the mountains he had not eaten.

At Fort Hall, Meek parted company with the missionaries, and with his wife and child. As the little black-eyed daughter took her departure in company with this new element in savage life,—the missionary society,—her father could have had no premonition of the fate to which the admixture of the savage and the religious elements was step by step consigning her.

After remaining a few days at the fort, Meek, who found some of his old comrades at this place, went trapping with them up the Portneuf, and soon made up a pack of one hundred and fifty beaver-skins. These, on returning to the fort, he delivered to Jo Walker, one of the American Company's traders at that time, and took Walker's receipt for them. He then, with Mansfield and Wilkins, set out about the first of September for the Flathead country, where Wilkins had a wife. In their company was an old Flathead woman, who wished to return to her people, and took this opportunity.

The weather was still extremely warm. It had been a season of great drought, and the streams were nearly all entirely dried up. The first night out, the horses, eight in [Pg 243] number, strayed off in search of water, and were lost. Now commenced a day of fearful sufferings. No water had been found since leaving the fort. The loss of the horses made it necessary for the company to separate to look for them; Mansfield and Wilkins going in one direction, Meek and the old Flathead woman in another. The little coolness and moisture which night had imparted to the atmosphere was quickly dissipated by the unchecked rays of the pitiless sun shining on a dry and barren plain, with not a vestige of verdure anywhere in sight. On and on went the old Flathead woman, keeping always in the advance, and on and on followed Meek, anxiously scanning the horizon for a chance sight of the horses. Higher and higher mounted the sun, the temperature increasing in intensity until the great plain palpitated with radiated heat, and the horizon flickered almost like a flame where the burning heavens met the burning earth. Meek had been drinking a good deal of rum at the fort, which circumstance did not lessen the terrible consuming thirst that was torturing him.

Noon came, and passed, and still the heat and the suffering increased, the fever and craving of hunger being now added to that of thirst. On and on, through the whole of that long scorching afternoon, trotted the old Flathead woman in the peculiar traveling gait of the Indian and the mountaineer, Meek following at a little distance, and going mad, as he thought, for a little water. And mad he probably was, as famine sometimes makes its victims. When night at last closed in, he laid down to die, as the missionary Smith had done before. But he did not remember Smith: he only thought of water, and heard it running, and fancied the old woman was lapping it like a wolf. Then he rose to follow her and find it; it was always just ahead, and the woman was [Pg 244] howling to him to show him the trail.

Thus the night passed, and in the cool of the early morning he experienced a little relief. He was really following his guide, who as on the day before was trotting on ahead. Then the thought possessed him to overtake and kill her, hoping from her shriveled body to obtain a morsel of food, and drop of moisture. But his strength was failing, and his guide so far ahead that he gave up the thought as involving too great

exertion, continuing to follow her in a helpless and hopeless kind of way.

At last! There was no mistake this time: he heard running water, and the old woman *was* lapping it like a wolf. With a shriek of joy he ran and fell on his face in the water, which was not more than one foot in depth, nor the stream more than fifteen feet wide. But it had a white pebbly bottom; and the water was clear, if not very cool. It was something to thank God for, which the none too religious trapper acknowledged by a fervent "Thank God!"

For a long time he lay in the water, swallowing it, and by thrusting his finger down his throat vomiting it up again, to prevent surfeit, his whole body taking in the welcome moisture at all its million pores. The fever abated, a feeling of health returned, and the late perishing man was restored to life and comparative happiness. The stream proved to be Godin's Fork, and here Meek and his faithful old guide rested until evening, in the shade of some willows, where their good fortune was completed by the appearance of Mansfield and Wilkins with the horses. The following morning the men found and killed a fat buffalo cow, whereby all their wants were supplied, and good feeling restored in the little camp.

From Godin's Fork they crossed over to Salmon River, and presently struck the Nez Perce trail which leads from that river over into the Beaver-head country, on the Beaver-head or Jefferson Fork of the Missouri, where there was a Flathead and Nez Perce village, on or about the present site of Virginia City, in Montana. [Pg 245]

Not stopping long here, Meek and his companions went on to the Madison Fork with the Indian village, and to the shores of Missouri Lake, joining in the fall hunt for buffalo.

HORSE-TAIL FALL.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Tell me all about a buffalo hunt," said the writer to Joe Meek, as we sat at a window overlooking the Columbia River, where it has a beautiful stretch of broad waters and curving wooded shores, and talking about mountain life, "tell me how you used to hunt buffalo."

"Waal, there is a good deal of sport in runnin' buffalo. When the camp discovered a band, then every man that wanted to run, made haste to catch his buffalo horse. We sometimes went out thirty or forty strong; sometimes two or three, and at other times a large party started on the hunt; the more the merrier. We alway had great bantering about our horses, each man, according to his own account, having the best one.

"When we first start we ride slow, so as not to alarm the buffalo. The nearer we come to the band the greater our excitement. The horses seem to feel it too, and are worrying to be off. When we come so near that the band starts, then the word is given, our horses' mettle is up, and away we go!

A BUFFALO HUNT.

"Thar may be ten thousand in a band. Directly we crowd them so close that nothing can be seen but dust, nor anything heard but the roar of their trampling and bellowing. The hunter now keeps close on their heels to escape being blinded by the dust, which does not rise as high as a man on horseback, for thirty yards behind the animals. As soon as we are close enough the firing begins, and the band is on the [Pg 247] run; and a herd of buffalo can run about as fast as a good race-horse. How they *do* thunder along! They give us a pretty sharp race. Take care! Down goes a rider, and away goes his horse with the band. Do you think we stopped to look after the fallen man? Not we. We rather thought that war fun, and if he got killed, why, 'he war unlucky, that war all. Plenty more men: couldn't bother about him.'

"Thar's a fat cow ahead. I force my way through the band to come up with her. The buffalo crowd around so that I have to put my foot on them, now on one side, now the other, to keep them off my horse. It is lively work, I can tell you. A man has to look sharp not to be run down by the band pressing him on; buffalo and horse at the top of their speed.

"Look out; thar's a ravine ahead, as you can see by the plunge which the band makes. Hold up! or somebody goes to the d—l now. If the band is large it fills the ravine full to the brim, and the hindmost of the herd pass over on top of the foremost. It requires horsemanship not to be carried over without our own consent; but then we mountain-men are *all* good horsemen. Over the ravine we go; but we do it our own way.

"We keep up the chase for about four miles, selecting our game as we run, and killing a number of fat cows to each man; some more and some less. When our horses are tired we slacken up, and turn back. We meet the camp-keepers with pack-horses. They soon butcher, pack up the meat, and we all return to camp, whar we laugh at each other's mishaps, and eat fat meat: and this constitutes the glory of mountain life."

"But you were going to tell me about the buffalo hunt at Missouri Lake?"

"Thar isn't much to tell. It war pretty much like other buffalo hunts. Thar war a lot of [Pg 248] us trappers happened to be at a Nez Perce and Flathead village in the fall of '38, when they war agoin' to kill winter meat; and as their hunt lay in the direction we war going, we joined in. The old Nez Perce chief, *Kow-e-so-te* had command of the village, and we trappers had to obey him, too.

"We started off slow; nobody war allowed to go ahead of camp. In this manner we caused the buffalo to move on before us, but not to be alarmed. We war eight or ten days traveling from the Beaver-head to Missouri Lake, and by the time we got thar, the whole plain around the lake war crowded with buffalo, and it war a splendid sight!

"In the morning the old chief harangued the men of his village, and ordered us all to get ready for the surround. About nine o'clock every man war mounted, and we began to move.

"That war a sight to make a man's blood warm! A thousand men, all trained hunters, on horseback, carrying their guns, and with their horses painted in the height of Indians' fashion. We advanced until within about half a mile of the herd; then the chief ordered us to deploy to the right and left, until the wings of the column extended a long way, and advance again.

"By this time the buffalo war all moving, and we had come to within a hundred yards of them. *Kow-e-so-te* then gave us the word, and away we went, pell-mell. Heavens, what a charge! What a rushing and roaring—men shooting, buffalo bellowing and trampling until the earth shook under them!

"It war the work of half an hour to slay two thousand or may be three thousand animals. When the work was over, we took a view of the field. Here and there and everywhere, laid the slain buffalo. Occasionally a horse with a broken leg war seen; or a man with a broken arm; or maybe he had fared worse, and had a broken head. [Pg 249]

"Now came out the women of the village to help us butcher and pack up the meat. It war a big job; but we war not long about it. By night the camp war full of meat, and everybody merry. Bridger's camp, which war passing that way, traded with the village for fifteen hundred buffalo tongues—the tongue being reckoned a choice part of the animal. And that's the way we helped the Nez Perces hunt buffalo."

"But when you were hunting for your own subsistence in camp, you sometimes went out in small parties?"

"Oh yes, it war the same thing on a smaller scale. One time Kit Carson and myself, and a little Frenchman, named Marteau, went to run buffalo on Powder River. When we came in sight of the band it war agreed that Kit and the Frenchman should do the running, and I should stay with the pack animals. The weather war very cold and I didn't like my part of the duty much.

"The Frenchman's horse couldn't run; so I lent him mine. Kit rode his own; not a good buffalo horse either. In running, my horse fell with the Frenchman, and nearly killed him. Kit, who couldn't make his horse catch, jumped off, and caught mine, and tried it again. This time he came up with the band, and killed four fat cows.

"When I came up with the pack-animals, I asked Kit how he came by my horse. He explained, and wanted to know if I had seen anything of Marteau: said my horse had fallen with him, and he thought killed him. 'You go over the other side of yon hill, and see,' said Kit.

"What'll I do with him if he is dead?" said I.

"Can't you pack him to camp?"

"Pack ——" said I; "I should rather pack a load of meat."

"Waal," said Kit, "I'll butcher, if you'll go over and see, anyhow." [Pg 250]

"So I went over, and found the dead man leaning his head on his hand, and groaning; for he war pretty bad hurt. I got him on his horse, though, after a while, and took him back to whar Kit war at work. We soon finished the butchering job, and started back to camp with our wounded Frenchman, and three loads of fat meat."

"You were not very compassionate toward each other, in the mountains?"

"That war not our business. We had no time for such things. Besides, live men war what we wanted; dead ones war of no account."

CHAPTER XX.

1838. From Missouri Lake, Meek started alone for the Gallatin Fork of the Missouri, trapping in a mountain basin called Gardiner's Hole. Beaver were plenty here, but it was getting late in the season, and the weather was cold in the mountains. On his return, in another basin called the Burnt Hole, he found a buffalo skull; and knowing that Bridger's camp would soon pass that way, wrote on it the number of beaver he had taken, and also his intention to go to Fort Hall to sell them.

In a few days the camp passing found the skull, which grinned its threat at the angry Booshways, as the chuckling trapper had calculated that it would. To prevent its execution runners were sent after him, who, however, failed to find him, and nothing was known of the supposed renegade for some time. But as Bridger passed through Pierre's Hole, on his way to Green river to winter, he was surprised at Meek's appearance in camp. He was soon invited to the lodge of the Booshways, and called to account for his supposed apostacy.

Meek, for a time, would neither deny nor confess, but put on his free trapper airs, and laughed in the face of the Booshways. Bridger, who half suspected some trick, took the matter lightly, but Dripps was very much annoyed, and made some threats, at which Meek only laughed the more. Finally the certificate from their own trader, Jo Walker, was produced, the new pack of furs surrendered, and Dripps' wrath turned into smiles of approval. [Pg 252]

Here again Meek parted company with the main camp, and went on an expedition with seven other trappers, under John Larison, to the Salmon River: but found the cold very severe on this journey, and the grass scarce and poor, so that the company lost most of their horses.

On arriving at the Nez Perce village in the Forks of the Salmon, Meek found the old

chief *Kow-e-so-te* full of the story of the missionaries and their religion, and anxious to hear preaching. Reports were continually arriving by the Indians, of the wonderful things which were being taught by Mr. and Mrs. Spalding at Lapwai, on the Clearwater, and at Waiilatpu, on the Walla-Walla River. It was now nearly two years since these missions had been founded, and the number of converts among the Nez Perces and Flatheads was already considerable.

Here was an opening for a theological student, such as Joe Meek was! After some little assumption of modesty, Meek intimated that he thought himself capable of giving instruction on religious subjects; and being pressed by the chief, finally consented to preach to *Kow-e-so-te's* people. Taking care first to hold a private council with his associates, and binding them not to betray him, Meek preached his first sermon that evening, going regularly through with the ordinary services of a "meeting."

These services were repeated whenever the Indians seemed to desire it, until Christmas. Then, the village being about to start upon a hunt, the preacher took occasion to intimate to the chief that a wife would be an agreeable present. To this, however, *Kow-e-so-te* demurred, saying that Spalding's religion did not permit men to have two wives: that the Nez Perces had many of them given up their wives on this account; and that therefore, since Meek already had one wife among the Nez Perces, [Pg 253] he could not have another without being false to the religion he professed.

To this perfectly clear argument Meek replied, that among white men, if a man's wife left him without his consent, as his had done, he could procure a divorce, and take another wife. Besides, he could tell him how the Bible related many stories of its best men having several wives. But *Kow-e-so-te* was not easily convinced. He could not see how, if the Bible approved of polygamy, Spalding should insist on the Indians putting away all but one of their wives. "However," says Meek, "after about two weeks' explanation of the doings of Solomon and David, I succeeded in getting the chief to give me a young girl, whom I called Virginia;—my present wife, and the mother of seven children."

After accompanying the Indians on their hunt to the Beaver-head country, where they found plenty of buffalo, Meek remained with the Nez Perce village until about the first of March, when he again intimated to the chief that it was the custom of white men to pay their preachers. Accordingly the people were notified, and the winter's salary began to arrive. It amounted altogether to thirteen horses, and many packs of beaver, beside sheep-skins and buffalo-robes; so that he "considered that with his young wife, he had made a pretty good winter's work of it."

In March he set out trapping again, in company with one of his comrades named Allen, a man to whom he was much attached. They traveled along up and down the Salmon, to Godin's River, Henry's Fork of the Snake, to Pierre's Fork, and Lewis' Fork, and the Muddy, and finally set their traps on a little stream that runs out of the pass which leads to Pierre's Hole. [Pg 254]

Leaving their camp one morning to take up their traps, they were discovered and attacked by a party of Blackfeet just as they came near the trapping ground. The only refuge at hand was a thicket of willows on the opposite side of the creek, and towards this the trappers directed their flight. Meek, who was in advance, succeeded in gaining the thicket without being seen; but Allen stumbled and fell in crossing the stream, and wet his gun. He quickly recovered his footing and crossed over; but the Blackfeet had seen him enter the thicket, and came up to within a short distance, yet not approaching too near the place where they knew he was concealed. Unfortunately, Allen, in his anxiety to be ready for defense, commenced snapping caps on his gun to dry it. The quick ears of the savages caught the sound, and understood the meaning of it. Knowing him to be defenceless, they plunged into the thicket after him, shooting him almost immediately, and dragging him out still breathing to a small prairie about two rods away.

And now commenced a scene which Meek was compelled to witness, and which he declares nearly made him insane through sympathy, fear, horror, and suspense as to his own fate. Those devils incarnate deliberately cut up their still palpitating victim into a hundred pieces, each taking a piece; accompanying the horrible and inhuman butchery with every conceivable gesture of contempt for the victim, and of hellish delight in their own acts.

Meek, who was only concealed by the small patch of willows, and a pit in the sand hastily scooped out with his knife until it was deep enough to lie in, was in a state of the most fearful excitement. All day long he had to endure the horrors of his position. Every moment seemed an hour, every hour a day, until when night came, and the Indians left the place, he was in a high state of fever. [Pg 255]

About nine o'clock that night he ventured to creep to the edge of the little prairie, where he lay and listened a long time, without hearing anything but the squirrels running over the dry leaves; but which he constantly feared was the stealthy approach of the enemy. At last, however, he summoned courage to crawl out on to

the open ground, and gradually to work his way to a wooded bluff not far distant. The next day he found two of his horses, and with these set out alone for Green River, where the American Company was to rendezvous. After twenty-six days of solitary and cautious travel he reached the appointed place in safety, having suffered fearfully from the recollection of the tragic scene he had witnessed in the death of his friend, and also from solitude and want of food.

The rendezvous of this year was at Bonneville's old fort on Green River, and was the last one held in the mountains by the American Fur Company. Beaver was growing scarce, and competition was strong. On the disbanding of the company, some went to Santa Fe, some to California, others to the Lower Columbia, and a few remained in the mountains trapping, and selling their furs to the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Hall. As to the leaders, some of them continued for a few years longer to trade with the Indians, and others returned to the States, to lose their fortunes more easily far than they made them.

Of the men who remained in the mountains trapping, that year, Meek was one. Leaving his wife at Fort Hall, he set out in company with a Shawnee, named Big Jim, to take beaver on Salt River, a tributary of the Snake. The two trappers had each his riding and his pack horse, and at night generally picketed them all; but one night Big Jim allowed one of his to remain loose to graze. This horse, after eating for some hours, came back and laid down behind the other horses, and every now and then [Pg 256] raised up his head; which slight movement at length aroused Big Jim's attention, and his suspicions also.

"My friend," said he in a whisper to Meek, "Indian steal our horses."

"Jump up and shoot," was the brief answer.

Jim shot, and ran out to see the result. Directly he came back saying: "My friend, I shoot my horse; break him neck;" and Big Jim became disconsolate over what his white comrade considered a very good joke.

The hunt was short and not very remunerative in furs. Meek soon returned to Fort Hall; and when he did so, found his new wife had left that post in company with a party under Newell, to go to Fort Crockett, on Green River,—Newell's wife being a sister of Virginia's,—on learning which he started on again alone, to join that party. On Bear River, he fell in with a portion of that Quixotic band, under Farnham, which was looking for paradise and perfection, something on the Fourier plan, somewhere in this western wilderness. They had already made the discovery in crossing the continent, that perfect disinterestedness was lacking among themselves; and that the nearer they got to their western paradise the farther off it seemed in their own minds.

Continuing his journey alone, soon after parting from Farnham, he lost the hammer of his gun, which accident deprived him of the means of subsisting himself, and he had no dried meat, nor provisions of any kind. The weather, too, was very cold, increasing the necessity for food to support animal heat. However, the deprivation of food was one of the accidents to which mountain-men were constantly liable, and one from which he had often suffered severely; therefore he pushed on, without feeling any unusual alarm, and had arrived within fifteen miles of the fort before he yielded [Pg 257] to the feeling of exhaustion, and laid down beside the trail to rest. Whether he would ever have finished the journey alone he could not tell; but fortunately for him, he was discovered by Jo Walker, and Gordon, another acquaintance, who chanced to pass that way toward the fort.

Meek answered their hail, and inquired if they had anything to eat. Walker replied in the affirmative, and getting down from his horse, produced some dried buffalo meat which he gave to the famishing trapper. But seeing the ravenous manner in which he began to eat, Walker inquired how long it had been since he had eaten anything.

"Five days since I had a bite."

"Then, my man, you can't have any more just now," said Walker, seizing the meat in alarm lest Meek should kill himself.

"It was hard to see that meat packed away again," says Meek in relating his sufferings, "I told Walker that if my gun had a hammer I'd shoot and eat him. But he talked very kindly, and helped me on my horse, and we all went on to the Fort."

At Fort Crockett were Newell and his party, the remainder of Farnham's party, a trading party under St. Clair, who owned the fort, Kit Carson, and a number of Meek's former associates, including Craig and Wilkins. Most of these men, Othello-like, had lost their occupation since the disbanding of the American Fur Company, and were much at a loss concerning the future. It was agreed between Newell and Meek to take what beaver they had to Fort Hall, to trade for goods, and return to Fort Crockett, where they would commence business on their own account with the Indians.

Accordingly they set out, with one other man belonging to Farnham's former adherents. They traveled to Henry's Fork, to Black Fork, where Fort Bridger now is, to Bear River, to Soda Springs, and finally to Fort Hall, suffering much from cold, and finding very little to eat by the way. At Fort Hall, which was still in charge of Courtenay Walker, Meek and Newell remained a week, when, having purchased their goods and horses to pack them, they once more set out on the long, cold journey to Fort Crockett. They had fifteen horses to take care of and only one assistant, a Snake Indian called Al. The return proved an arduous and difficult undertaking. The cold was very severe; they had not been able to lay in a sufficient stock of provisions at Fort Hall, and game there was none, on the route. By the time they arrived at Ham's Fork the only atom of food they had left was a small piece of bacon which they had been carefully saving to eat with any poor meat they might chance to find. [Pg 258]

The next morning after camping on Ham's Fork was stormy and cold, the snow filling the air; yet Snake Al, with a promptitude by no means characteristic of him, rose early and went out to look after the horses.

"By that same token," said Meek to Newell, "Al has eaten the bacon." And so it proved, on investigation. Al's uneasy conscience having acted as a goad to stir him up to begin his duties in season. On finding his conjecture confirmed, Meek declared his intention, should no game be found before next day night, of killing and eating Al, to get back the stolen bacon. But Providence interfered to save Al's bacon. On the following afternoon the little party fell in with another still smaller but better supplied party of travelers, comprising a Frenchman and his wife. These had plenty of fat antelope meat, which they freely parted with to the needy ones, whom also they accompanied to Fort Crockett. [Pg 259]

It was now Christmas; and the festivities which took place at the Fort were attended with a good deal of rum drinking, in which Meek, according to his custom, joined, and as a considerable portion of their stock in trade consisted of this article, it may fairly be presumed that the home consumption of these two "lone traders" amounted to the larger half of what they had with so much trouble transported from Fort Hall. In fact, "times were bad enough" among the men so suddenly thrown upon their own resources among the mountains, at a time when that little creature, which had made mountain life tolerable, or possible, was fast being exterminated.

To make matters more serious, some of the worst of the now unemployed trappers had taken to a life of thieving and mischief which made enemies of the friendly Indians, and was likely to prevent the better disposed from enjoying security among any of the tribes. A party of these renegades, under a man named Thompson, went over to Snake River to steal horses from the Nez Perces. Not succeeding in this, they robbed the Snake Indians of about forty animals, and ran them off to the Uintee, the Indians following and complaining to the whites at Fort Crockett that their people had been robbed by white trappers, and demanding restitution.

According to Indian law, when one of a tribe offends, the whole tribe is responsible. Therefore if whites stole their horses they might take vengeance on any whites they met, unless the property was restored. In compliance with this well understood requisition of Indian law, a party was made up at Fort Crockett to go and retake the horses, and restore them to their rightful owners. This party consisted of Meek, Craig, Newell, Carson, and twenty-five others, under the command of Jo Walker.

The horses were found on an island in Green River, the robbers having domiciled themselves in an old fort at the mouth of the Uintee. In order to avoid having a fight with the renegades, whose white blood the trappers were not anxious to spill, Walker made an effort to get the horses off the island undiscovered. But while horses and men were crossing the river on the ice, the ice sinking with them until the water was knee-deep, the robbers discovered the escape of their booty, and charging on the trappers tried to recover the horses. In this effort they were not successful; while Walker made a masterly flank movement and getting in Thompson's rear, ran the horses into the fort, where he stationed his men, and succeeded in keeping the robbers on the outside. Thompson then commenced giving the horses away to a village of Utes in the neighborhood of the fort, on condition that they should assist in retaking them. On his side, Walker threatened the Utes with dire vengeance if they dared interfere. The Utes who had a wholesome fear not only of the trappers, but of their foes the Snakes, declined to enter into the quarrel. After a day of strategy, and of threats alternated with arguments, strengthened by a warlike display, the trappers marched out of the fort before the faces of the discomfitted thieves, taking their booty with them, which was duly restored to the Snakes on their return to Fort Crockett, and peace secured once more with that people. [Pg 260]

Still times continued bad. The men not knowing what else to do, went out in small parties in all directions seeking adventures, which generally were not far to find. On one of these excursions Meek went with a party down the canyon of Green River, on the ice. For nearly a hundred miles they traveled down this awful canyon without finding but one place where they could have come out; and left it at last at the mouth of the Uintee. [Pg 261]

This passed the time until March. Then the company of Newell and Meek was joined by Antoine Rubideau, who had brought goods from Santa Fe to trade with the Indians. Setting out in company, they traded along up Green River to the mouth of Ham's fork, and camped. The snow was still deep in the mountains, and the trappers found great sport in running antelope. On one occasion a large herd, numbering several hundreds, were run on to the ice, on Green River, where they were crowded into an air hole, and large numbers slaughtered only for the cruel sport which they afforded.

But killing antelope needlessly was not by any means the worst of amusements practiced in Rubideau's camp. That foolish trader occupied himself so often and so long in playing *Hand*, (an Indian game,) that before he parted with his new associates he had gambled away his goods, his horses, and even his wife; so that he returned to Santa Fe much poorer than nothing—since he was in debt.

On the departure of Rubideau, Meek went to Fort Hall, and remained in that neighborhood, trapping and trading for the Hudson's Bay Company, until about the last of June, when he started for the old rendezvous places of the American Companies, hoping to find some divisions of them at least, on the familiar camping ground. But his journey was in vain. Neither on Green River or Wind River, where for ten years he had been accustomed to meet the leaders and their men, his old comrades in danger, did he find a wandering brigade even. The glory of the American companies was departed, and he found himself solitary among his long familiar haunts.

With many melancholy reflections, the man of twenty-eight years of age recalled how, a mere boy, he had fallen half unawares into the kind of life he had ever since led amongst the mountains, with only other men equally the victims of circumstance, and the degraded savages, for his companions. The best that could be made of it, such life had been and must be constantly deteriorating to the minds and souls of himself and his associates. Away from all laws, and refined habits of living; away from the society of religious, modest, and accomplished women; always surrounded by savage scenes, and forced to cultivate a taste for barbarous things—what had this life made of him? what was he to do with himself in the future? [Pg 262]

Sick of trapping and hunting, with brief intervals of carousing, he felt himself to be. And then, even if he were not, the trade was no longer profitable enough to support him. What could he do? where could he go? He remembered his talk with Mrs. Whitman, that fair, tall, courteous, and dignified lady who had stirred in him longings to return to the civilized life of his native state. But he felt unfit for the society of such as she. Would he ever, could he ever attain to it now? He had promised her he might go over into Oregon and settle down. But could he settle down? Should he not starve at trying to do what other men, mechanics and farmers, do? And as to learning, he had none of it; there was no hope then of "living by his wits," as some men did—missionaries and artists and school teachers, some of whom he had met at the rendezvous. Heigho! to be checkmated in life at twenty-eight, that would never do.

At Fort Hall, on his return, he met two more missionaries and their wives going to Oregon, but these four did not affect him pleasantly; he had no mind to go with them. Instead, he set out on what proved to be his last trapping expedition, with a Frenchman, named Mattileau. They visited the old trapping grounds on Pierre's Fork, Lewis' Lake, Jackson's River, Jackson's Hole, Lewis River and Salt River: but beaver were scarce; and it was with a feeling of relief that, on returning by way of Bear River, Meek heard from a Frenchman whom he met there, that he was wanted at Fort Hall, by his friend Newell, who had something to propose to him. [Pg 263]

CASTLE ROCK.

CHAPTER XXI.

1840. When Meek arrived at Fort Hall, where Newell was awaiting him, he found that the latter had there the two wagons which Dr. Whitman had left at the points on the journey where further transportation by their means had been pronounced impossible. The Doctor's idea of finding a passable wagon-road over the lava plains and the heavily timbered mountains lying between Fort Hall and the Columbia River, seemed to Newell not so wild a one as it was generally pronounced to be in the mountains. At all events, he was prepared to undertake the journey. The wagons were put in traveling order, and horses and mules purchased for the expedition.

"Come," said Newell to Meek, "we are done with this life in the mountains—done with wading in beaver-dams, and freezing or starving alternately—done with Indian trading and Indian fighting. The fur trade is dead in the Rocky Mountains, and it is no place for us now, if ever it was. We are young yet, and have life before us. We cannot waste it here; we cannot or will not return to the States. Let us go down to the Wallamet and take farms. There is already quite a settlement there made by the Methodist Mission and the Hudson's Bay Company's retired servants.

"I have had some talk with the Americans who have gone down there, and the talk is that the country is going to be settled up by our people, and that the Hudson's Bay Company are not going to rule this country much longer. What do you say, Meek? Shall we turn American settlers?" [Pg 265]

"I'll go where you do, Newell. What suits you suits me."

"I thought you'd say so, and that's why I sent for you, Meek. In my way of thinking, a white man is a little better than a Canadian Frenchman. I'll be —— if I'll hang 'round a post of the Hudson's Bay Company. So you'll go?"

"I reckon I will! What have you got for me to do? *I* haven't got anything to begin with but a wife and baby!"

"Well, you can drive one of the wagons, and take your family and traps along. Nicholas will drive the other, and I'll play leader, and look after the train. Craig will go also, so we shall be quite a party, with what strays we shall be sure to pick up."

Thus it was settled. Thus Oregon began to receive her first real emigrants, who were neither fur-traders nor missionaries, but true frontiersmen—border-men. The training which the mountain-men had received in the service of the fur companies admirably fitted them to be, what afterwards they became, a valuable and indispensable element in the society of that country in whose peculiar history they played an important part. But we must not anticipate their acts before we have witnessed their gradual transformation from lawless rangers of the wilderness, to law-abiding and even law-making and law-executing citizens of an isolated territory.

In order to understand the condition of things in the Wallamet Valley, or Lower Columbia country, it will be necessary to revert to the earliest history of that territory, as sketched in the first chapter of this book. A history of the fur companies is a history of Oregon up to the year 1834, so far as the occupation of the country was concerned. But its political history was begun long before—from the time (May 11th, 1792) when the captain of a New England coasting and fur-trading vessel entered the great "River of the West," which nations had been looking for a hundred years. At the very time when the inquisitive Yankee was heading his little vessel through the white line of breakers at the mouth of the long-sought river, a British exploring expedition was scanning the shore between it and the Straits of Fuca, having wisely declared its scientific opinion that there was no such river on that coast. Vancouver, the chief of that expedition, so assured the Yankee trader, whose views did not agree with his own: and, Yankee-like, the trader turned back to satisfy himself. [Pg 266]

A bold and lucky man was Captain Gray of the ship *Columbia*. No explorer he—only an adventurous and, withal, a prudent trader, with an eye to the main chance; emulous, too, perhaps, of a little glory! It is impossible to conceive how he could have done this thing calmly. We think his stout heart must have shivered somewhat, both with anticipation and dread, as he ran for the "opening," and plunged into the frightful tumult—straight through the proper channel, thank God! and sailed out on to the bosom of that beautiful bay, twenty-five miles by six, which the great river forms at its mouth.

We trust the morning was fine: for then Captain Gray must have beheld a sight which a discoverer should remember for a lifetime. This magnificent bay, surrounded by lofty hills, clad thick with noble forests of fir, and fretted along its margin with spurs of the highlands, forming other smaller bays and coves, into which ran streams whose valleys were hidden among the hills. From beyond the farthest point, whose dark ridge jutted across this inland sea, flowed down the deep, broad river, whose [Pg 267]

course and origin was still a magnificent mystery, but which indicated by its volume that it drained a mighty region of probable great fertility and natural wealth. Perhaps Captain Gray did not fully realize the importance of his discovery. If the day was fine, with a blue sky, and the purple shadows lying in among the hills, with smooth water before him and the foamy breakers behind—*if* he felt what his discovery was, in point of importance, to the world, he was a proud and happy man, and enjoyed the reward of his daring.

The only testimony on that head is the simple entry on his log-book, telling us that he had named the river "*Columbia's River*,"—with an apostrophe, that tiny point intimating much. This was one ground of the American claim, though Vancouver, after Gray had reported his success to him, sent a lieutenant to explore the river, and then claimed the discovery for England! The next claim of the United States upon the Oregon territory was by virtue of the Florida treaty and the Louisiana purchase. These, and the general one of natural boundaries, England contested also. Hence the treaty of joint occupancy for a term of ten years, renewable, unless one of the parties to it gave a twelve-month's notice of intention to withdraw. Meantime this question of territorial claims hung over the national head like the sword suspended by a hair, which statesmen delight in referring to. We did not dare to say Oregon was ours, because we were afraid England would make war on us; and England did not dare say Oregon was hers, for the same reason. Therefore "joint-occupancy" was the polite word with which statesmen glossed over the fact that Great Britain actually possessed the country through the monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company. That [Pg 268]
company had a good thing so long as the government of Great Britain prevented any outbreak, by simply renewing the treaty every ten years. Their manner of doing business was such as to prevent any less powerful corporation from interfering with them, while individual enterprise was sure to be crushed at the start.

But "man proposes and God disposes." In 1834, the Methodist Episcopal Board of Missions sent out four missionaries to labor among the Indians. These were two preachers, the Rev. Messrs. Jason and Daniel Lee, and two lay members, Cyrus Shepard and P.L. Edwards. These gentlemen were liberally furnished with all the necessaries and comforts of life by the Board, in addition to which they received the kindest attentions and consideration from the officers of the Hudson's Bay Company at Vancouver. Their vessel, the *May Dacre*, Captain Lambert, had arrived safely in the river with the mission goods. The gentlemen at Vancouver encouraged their enterprise, and advised them to settle in the Wallamet valley, the most fertile tract of country west of the Rocky Mountains. Being missionaries, nothing was to be feared from them in the way of trade. The Wallamet valley was a good country for the mission—at the same time it was south of the Columbia River. This latter consideration was not an unimportant one with the Hudson's Bay Company, it being understood among those in the confidence of the British government, that in case the Oregon territory had to be divided with the United States, the Columbia River would probably be made the northern boundary of the American possessions.

There was nothing in the character of the Christian Missionary's labor which the Hudson's Bay Company could possibly object to without a palpable violation of the [Pg 269]
Convention of 1818. Therefore, although the Methodist mission in the Wallamet Valley received a large accession to its numbers in 1837, they were as kindly welcomed as had been those of 1834; and also those Presbyterian missionaries of 1836, who had settled in the "upper country."

Three points, however, the Hudson's Bay Company insisted upon, so far as, under the treaty, they could; the Americans must not trade with the Indians, but confine themselves to agricultural pursuits and missionary labor, and keep on the south side of the Columbia.

Not an immigrant entered Oregon in that day who did not proceed at once to Vancouver: nor was there one who did not meet with the most liberal and hospitable treatment. Neither was this hospitality a trifling benefit; to the weary traveler just arrived from a long and most fatiguing journey, it was extremely welcome and refreshing. At Vancouver was the only society, and the only luxurious living to be enjoyed on the whole Northwest coast.

At the head of the first was Dr. John McLaughlin, already mentioned as the Chief Factor, and Deputy Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company in Oregon, and all the Northwest. He was of Scotch origin, and Canadian birth, a gentleman bred, with a character of the highest integrity, to which were united justice and humanity. His position as head of the Hudson's Bay Company's affairs, was no enviable one during that period of Oregon history which followed the advent of Americans in the Wallamet Valley. Himself a British subject, and a representative of that powerful corporation which bent the British Government to its will, he was bound to execute its commands when they did not conflict too strongly with his consciousness of right
and justice. [Pg 270]

As has been stated, the Methodist mission settlement was reinforced in 1837, by the arrival of about twenty persons, among whom were several ladies, and a few

children. These, like those preceding them, were first entertained at Fort Vancouver before proceeding to the mission, which was between fifty and sixty miles up the Wallamet, in the heart of that delightful valley. These persons came by a sailing vessel around Cape Horn, bringing with them supplies for the mission.

In the two following years there were about a dozen missionary arrivals overland, all of whom tarried a short time at the American Company's rendezvous, as before related. These were some of them designed for the upper country, but most of them soon settled in the Wallamet valley.

During these years, between 1834 and 1840, there had drifted into the valley various persons from California, the Rocky Mountains, and from the vessels which sometimes appeared in the Columbia; until at the time when Newell and Meek resolved to quit the mountains, the American settlers numbered nearly one hundred, men, women, and children. Of these, about thirty belonged to the missions; the remainder were mountain-men, sailors, and adventurers. The mountain-men, most of them, had native wives. Besides the Americans there were sixty Canadian Frenchmen, who had been retired upon farms by the Hudson's Bay Company; and who would probably have occupied these farms so long as the H.B. Company should have continued to do business in Oregon.

CHAPTER XXII.

When it was settled that Newell and Meek were to go to the Wallamet, they lost no time in dallying, but packed the wagons with whatever they possessed in the way of worldly goods, topped them with their Nez Perce wives and half-breed children, and started for Walla-Walla, accompanied by Craig, another mountain-man, and either followed or accompanied by several others. Meek drove a five-in-hand team of four horses and one mule. Nicholas drove the other team of four horses, and Newell, who owned the train, was mounted as leader.

The journey was no easy one, extending as it did over immense plains of lava, round impassable canyons, over rapid unbridged rivers, and over mountains hitherto believed to be only passable for pack trains. The honor which has heretofore been accorded to the Presbyterian missionaries solely, of opening a wagon road from the Rocky Mountains to the Columbia River, should in justice be divided with these two mountaineers, who accomplished the most difficult part of this difficult journey.

Arrived at Fort Boise, a post of the Hudson's Bay Company, the little caravan stopped for a few days to rest and recruit their animals. With the usual courtesy of that Company, Mr. Payette, the trader in charge, offered Newell quarters in the fort, as leader of his party. To Meek and Craig who were encamped outside, he sent a piece of sturgeon with his compliments, which our incipient Oregonians sent back again [Pg 272] with *their* compliments. No Hudson's Bay distinctions of rank for them! No, indeed! The moment that an American commenced to think of himself as a settler on the most remote corner of American soil, that moment, as if by instinct, he began to defend and support his republicanism.

After a few days' rest, the party went on, encountering, as might be expected, much difficulty and toil, but arriving safely after a reasonable time at the Columbia River, at the junction of the Umatilla. Here the wagons and stock were crossed over, and the party proceeded directly to Dr. Whitman's mission at Waiilatpu. Dr. Whitman gave them a friendly reception; killing for them, if not the fatted calf, the fattest hog he had; telling Meek at the same time that "fat pork was good for preachers," referring to Meek's missionary labors among the Nez Perces.

During the three years since the commencement of the mission at Waiilatpu considerable advancement had been made in the progress of civilization among the Cayuses. Quite a number of Indian children were domesticated with Mrs. Whitman, who were rapidly acquiring a knowledge of housekeeping, sewing, reading, and writing, and farm labor. With Mrs. Whitman, for whom Meek still entertained great admiration and respect, he resolved to leave his little girl, Helen Mar; the fruit of his connexion with the Nez Perce woman who persisted in abandoning him in the mountains, as already related. Having thus made provision for the proper instruction of his daughter, and conferred with the Doctor on the condition of the American settlers in Oregon—the Doctor being an ardent American—Meek and his associates started once more for the Wallamet.

At Walla-Walla Newell decided to leave the wagons, the weather having become so rainy and disagreeable as to make it doubtful about getting them over the Cascade [Pg 273] Mountains that fall. Accordingly the goods were transferred to pack-horses for the remainder of the journey. In the following year, however, one of the wagons was brought down by Newell, and taken to the plains on the Tualatin River, being the first vehicle of the kind in the Wallamet Valley.

On arriving at the Dalles of the Columbia, our mountain men found that a mission had been established at that place for the conversion of those inconscionable thieves, the Wish-ram Indians, renowned in Indian history for their acquisitiveness. This mission was under the charge of Daniel Lee and a Mr. Perkins, and was an offshoot of the Methodist Mission in the Wallamet Valley. These gentlemen having found the benighted condition of the Indians to exceed their powers of enlightment in any ordinary way, were having recourse to extraordinary efforts, and were carrying on what is commonly termed a *revival*; though what piety there was in the hearts of these savages to be revived, it would be difficult to determine. However, they doubtless hoped so to wrestle with God themselves, as to compel a blessing upon their labors.

The Indians indeed were not averse to prayer. They could pray willingly and sincerely enough when they could hope for a speedy and actual material answer to their prayers. And it was for that, and that only, that they importuned the Christian's God. Finding that their prayers were not answered according to their desire, it at length became difficult to persuade them to pray at all. Sometimes, it is true, they succeeded in deluding the missionaries with the belief that they were really converted, for a time. One of these most hopeful converts at the Dalles mission, being in want of a shirt and capote, volunteered to "pray for a whole year," if Mr. Lee would furnish him with these truly desirable articles. [Pg 274]

It is no wonder that with such hopeless material to work upon the Dalles missionaries withdrew from them a portion of their zeal, and bestowed it, where it was quite as much needed, upon any "stray mountain-man" who chanced to be entertained "within their gates." Newell's party, among others, received the well-meant, but not always well-received or appreciated attentions of these gentlemen. The American mountaineer was not likely to be suddenly surprised into praying in earnest; and he generally had too much real reverence to be found making a jest in the form of a mocking-prayer.

Not so scrupulous, however, was Jandreau, a lively French Canadian, who was traveling in company with the Americans. On being repeatedly importuned to pray, with that tireless zeal which distinguishes the Methodist preacher above all others, Jandreau appeared suddenly to be smitten with a consciousness of his guilt, and kneeling in the midst of the 'meeting,' began with clasped hands and upturned eyes to pour forth a perfect torrent of words. With wonderful dramatic power he appeared to confess, to supplicate, to agonize, in idiomatic French. His tears and ejaculations touched the hearts of the missionaries, and filled them with gladness. They too ejaculated and wept, with frequently uttered "Amens" and "hallelujahs," until the scene became highly dramatic and exciting. In the midst of this grand tableau, when the enthusiasm was at its height, Jandreau suddenly ceased and rose to his feet, while an irrepressible outburst of laughter from his associates aroused the astonished missionaries to a partial comprehension of the fact that they had been made the subjects of a practical joke, though they never knew to exactly how great an extent.

The mischievous Frenchman had only recited with truly artistic power, and with such variations as the situation suggested, one of the most wonderful and effective tales from the *Arabian Nights Entertainment*, with which he was wont to delight and amuse his comrades beside the winter camp-fire! [Pg 275]

But Jandreau was called to account when he arrived at Vancouver. Dr. McLaughlin had heard the story from some of the party, and resolved to punish the man's irreverence, at the same time that he gave himself a bit of amusement. Sending for the Rev. Father Blanchet, who was then resident at Vancouver, he informed him of the circumstance, and together they arranged Jandreau's punishment. He was ordered to appear in their united presence, and make a true statement of the affair. Jandreau confessed that he had done what he was accused of doing—made a mock of prayer, and told a tale instead of offering a supplication. He was then ordered by the Rev. Father to rehearse the scene exactly as it occurred, in order that he might judge of the amount of his guilt, and apportion him his punishment.

Trembling and abashed, poor Jandreau fell upon his knees and began the recital with much trepidation. But as he proceeded he warmed with the subject, his dramatic instinct asserted itself, tears streamed, and voice and eyes supplicated, until this second representation threatened to outdo the first. With outward gravity and inward mirth his two solemn judges listened to the close, and when Jandreau rose quite exhausted from his knees, Father Blanchet hastily dismissed him with an admonition and a light penance. As the door of Dr. McLaughlin's office closed behind him, not only the Doctor, but Father Blanchet indulged in a burst of long restrained laughter at the comical absurdities of this impious Frenchman.

To return to our immigrants. On leaving the Dalles they proceeded on down the south side of the river as far as practicable, or opposite to the Wind Mountain. At this point the Indians assisted to cross them over to the north side, when they again made their way along the river as far as *Tea Prairie* above Vancouver. The weather was [Pg 276]

execrable, with a pouring rain, and sky of dismal gray; December being already far advanced. Our travelers were not in the best of humors: indeed a saint-like amiability is seldom found in conjunction with rain, mud, fatigue, and an empty stomach. Some ill-natured suspicions were uttered to the effect that the Indians who were assisting to cross the party at this point, had stolen some ropes that were missing.

Upon this dishonorable insinuation the Indian heart was fired, and a fight became imminent. This undesirable climax to emigrant woes was however averted by an attack upon the indignant natives with firebrands, when they prudently retired, leaving the travelers to pursue their way in peace. It was on Sunday that the weary, dirty, hungry little procession arrived at a place on the Wallamet River where the present town of Milwaukie is situated, and found here two missionaries, the Rev. Messrs. Waller and Beers, who were preaching to the Indians.

Meek immediately applied to Mr. Waller for some provisions, and received for answer that it was "Sunday." Mr. Waller, however, on being assured that it was no more agreeable starving on Sunday than a week-day, finally allowed the immigrants to have a peck of small potatoes. But as a party of several persons could not long subsist on so short allowance, and as there did not seem to be any encouragement to expect more from the missionaries, there was no course left to be pursued but to make an appeal to Fort Vancouver.

To Fort Vancouver then, Newell went the next day, and returned on the following one with some dried salmon, tea, sugar, and sea-bread. It was not quite what the [Pg 277] mountain-men could have wished, this dependence on the Hudson's Bay Company for food, and did not quite agree with what they had said when their hearts were big in the mountains. Being patriotic on a full stomach is easy compared to being the same thing on an empty one; a truth which became more and more apparent as the winter progressed, and the new settlers found that if they would eat they must ask food of some person or persons outside of the Methodist Mission. And outside of that there was in all the country only the Hudson's Bay Company, and a few mountain-men like themselves, who had brought nothing into the country, and could get nothing out of it at present.

There was but short time in which to consider what was to be done. Newell and Meek went to Wallamet Falls, the day after Newell's return from Vancouver, and there met an old comrade, Doughty, who was looking for a place to locate. The three made their camp together on the west side of the river, on a hill overlooking the Falls. While in camp they were joined by two other Rocky Mountain men, Wilkins and Ebbarts, who were also looking for a place to settle in. There were now six of the Rocky Mountain men together; and they resolved to push out into the plains to the west of them, and see what could be done in the matter of selecting homes.

As for our hero, we fear we cannot say much of him here which would serve to render him heroic in criticising Yankee eyes. He was a mountain-man, and *that only*. He had neither book learning, nor a trade, nor any knowledge of the simplest affairs appertaining to the ordinary ways of getting a living. He had only his strong hands, and a heart naturally stout and light.

His friend Newell had the advantage of him in several particulars. He had rather [Pg 278] more book-knowledge, more business experience, and also more means. With these advantages he became a sort of "Booshway" among his old comrades, who consented to follow his lead in the important movement about to be made, and settle in the Tualatin Plains should he decide to do so.

Accordingly camp was raised, and the party proceeded to the Plains, where they arrived on Christmas, and went into camp again. The hardships of mountain life were light compared to the hardships of this winter. For in the mountains, when the individual's resources were exhausted, there was always the Company to go to, which was practically inexhaustible. Should it be necessary, the Company was always willing to become the creditor of a good mountain-man. And the debtor gave himself no uneasiness, because he knew that if he lived he could discharge his indebtedness. But everything was different now. There was no way of paying debts, even if there had been a company willing to give them credit, which there was not, at least among Americans. Hard times they had seen in the mountains; harder times they were likely to see in the valley; indeed were already experiencing.

Instead of fat buffalo meat, antelope, and mountain mutton, which made the plenty of a camp on Powder River, our carniverous hunters were reduced to eating daily a little boiled wheat. In this extremity, Meek went on an expedition of discovery across the highlands that border the Lower Wallamet, and found on Wappatoo (now Sauvis) Island, a Mr. and Mrs. Baldra living, who were in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, and drew rations from them. With great kindness they divided the provisions on hand, furnishing him with dried salmon and sea-bread, to which he added ducks and swans procured from the Indians. Poor and scanty as was the [Pg 279] supply thus obtained, it was, after boiled wheat, comparative luxury while it lasted.

1841. The winter proved a very disagreeable one. Considerable snow fell early, and

went off with heavy rains, flooding the whole country. The little camp on the Tualatin Plains had no defence from the weather better than Indian lodges, and one small cabin built by Doughty on a former visit to the Plains; for Doughty had been one of the first of the mountain-men to come to the Wallamet on the breaking up of the fur companies. Indian lodges, or no lodges at all, were what the men were used to; but in the dryer climate of the Rocky Mountains it had not seemed such a miserable life, as it now did, where, for months together, the ground was saturated with rain, while the air was constantly charged with vapor.

As for going anywhere, or doing anything, either were equally impossible. No roads, the streams all swollen and out of banks, the rains incessant, there was nothing for them but to remain in camp and wait for the return of spring. When at last the rainy season was over, and the sun shining once more, most of the mountain-men in the Tualatin Plains camp took land-claims and set to work improving them. Of those who began farming that spring, were Newell, Doughty, Wilkins, and Walker. These obtained seed-wheat from the Hudson's Bay Company, also such farming implements as they must have, and even oxen to draw the plow through the strong prairie sod. The wheat was to be returned to the company—the cattle also; and the farming implements paid for whenever the debtor became able. This was certainly liberal conduct on the part of a company generally understood to be opposed to American settlement.

CHAPTER XXIII.

1841. When spring opened, Meek assisted Newell in breaking the ground for wheat. This done, it became necessary to look out for some immediately paying employment. But paying occupations were hard to find in that new country. At last, like everybody else, Meek found himself, if not "hanging about," at least frequently visiting Vancouver. Poor as he was, and unpromising as looked the future, he was the same light-hearted, reckless, and fearless Joe Meek that he had been in the mountains: as jaunty and jolly a ragged mountaineer as ever was seen at the Fort. Especially he delighted in recounting his Indian fights, because the Company, and Dr. McLaughlin in particular, disapproved the American Company's conduct with the Indians.

When the Doctor chanced to overhear Meek's stories, as he sometimes did, he would say "Mr. Joe, Mr. Joe,—(a habit the Doctor had of speaking rapidly, and repeating his words,)—Mr. Joe, Mr. Joe, you must leave off killing Indians, and go to work."

"I can't work," Meek would answer in his impressively slow and smooth utterance, at the same time giving his shoulders a slight shrug, and looking the Doctor pleasantly in the face.

During the summer, however, the United States Exploring Squadron, under Commodore Wilkes, entered the Columbia River, and proceeded to explore the country in several directions; and it was now that Meek found an employment suited to him; being engaged by Wilkes as pilot and servant while on his several tours through the country. [Pg 281]

On the arrival of three vessels of the squadron at Vancouver, and the first ceremonious visit of Dr. McLaughlin and his associates to Commodore Wilkes on board, there was considerable display, the men in the yards, saluting, and all the honors due to the representative of a friendly foreign power. After dinner, while the guests were walking on deck engaged in conversation, the talk turned upon the loss of the *Peacock*, one of the vessels belonging to the U.S. squadron, which was wrecked on the bar at the mouth of the Columbia. The English gentlemen were polite enough to be expressing their regrets at the loss to the United States, when Meek, who had picked up a little history in spite of his life spent in the mountains, laughingly interrupted with:

"No loss at all, gentlemen. Uncle Sam can get another Peacock the way he got that one."

Wilkes, who probably regretted the allusion, as not being consonant with the spirit of hospitality, passed over the interruption in silence. But when the gentlemen from Vancouver had taken leave he turned to Meek with a meaning twinkle in his eyes:

"Meek," said he, "go down to my cabin and you'll find there something good to eat, and some first-rate brandy." Of course Meek went.

While Wilkes was exploring in the Cowelitz Valley, with Meek and a Hudson's Bay man named Forrest, as guides, he one day laid down in his tent to sleep, leaving his chronometer watch lying on the camp-table beside him. Forrest, happening to observe that it did not agree with his own, which he believed to be correct, very kindly, as he supposed, regulated it to agree with his. On awakening and taking up his watch, a puzzled expression came over Wilkes' face for a moment, as he [Pg 282]

discovered the change in the time; then one of anger and disappointment, as what had occurred flashed over his mind; followed by some rather strong expressions of indignation. Forrest was penitent when he perceived the mischief done by his meddling, but that would not restore the chronometer to the true time: and this accident proved a serious annoyance and hindrance during the remainder of the expedition.

After exploring the Cowelitz Valley, Wilkes dispatched a party under Lieutenant Emmons, to proceed up the Wallamet Valley, thence south along the old trail of the Hudson's Bay Company, to California. Meek was employed to pilot this party, which had reached the head of the valley, when it became necessary to send for some papers in the possession of the Commodore; and he returned to Astoria upon this duty. On joining Emmons again he found that some of his men had become disaffected toward him; especially Jandreau, the same Frenchman who prayed so dramatically at the Dalles.

Jandreau confided to Meek that he hated Emmons, and intended to kill him. The next morning when Lieut. E. was examining the arms of the party, he fired off Jandreau's gun, which being purposely overcharged, flew back and inflicted some injuries upon the Lieutenant.

"What do you mean by loading a gun like that?" inquired Emmons, in a rage.

"I meant it to kill two Injuns;—one before, and one behind;" answered Jandreau.

As might be conjectured Jandreau was made to fire his own gun after that.

The expedition had not proceeded much farther when it again became necessary to send an express to Vancouver, and Meek was ordered upon this duty. Here he found [Pg 283] that Wilkes had purchased a small vessel which he named the *Oregon*, with which he was about to leave the country. As there was no further use for his services our quondam trapper was again thrown out of employment. In this exigency, finding it necessary to make some provision for the winter, he became a gleaner of wheat in the fields of his more provident neighbors, by which means a sufficient supply was secured to keep himself and his small family in food until another spring.

When winter set in, Meek paid a visit to the new mission. He had been there once before, in the spring, to buy an axe. Think, O reader, of traveling fifty or more miles, on horseback, or in a small boat, to procure so simple and necessary an article of civilized life as an axe! But none of the every-day conveniencies of living grow spontaneously in the wilderness—more's the pity:—else life in the wilderness would be thought more delightful far than life in the most luxurious of cities; inasmuch as Nature is more satisfying than art.

Meek's errand to the mission on this occasion was to find whether he could get a cow, and credit at the same time: for the prospect of living for another winter on boiled wheat was not a cheerful one. He had not succeeded, and was returning, when at Champoeg he met a Mr. Whitcom, superintendent of the mission farm. A conversation took place wherein Meek's desire for a cow became known. The missionaries never lost an opportunity of proposing prayers, and Mr. Whitcom thought this a good one. After showing much interest in the condition of Meek's soul, it was proposed that he should pray.

"*I* can't pray: that's your business, not mine," said Meek pleasantly. [Pg 284]

"It is every man's business to pray for himself," answered Whitcom.

"Very well; some other time will do for that. What I want now is a cow."

"How can you expect to get what you want, if you wont ask for it?" inquired Whitcom.

"I reckon I have asked you; and I don't see nary cow yet."

"You must ask God, my friend: but in the first place you must pray to be forgiven for your sins."

"I'll tell you what I'll do. If you will furnish the cow, I'll agree to pray for half an hour, right here on the spot."

"Down on your knees then."

"You'll furnish the cow?"

"Yes," said Whitcom, fairly cornered.

Down on his knees dropped the merry reprobate, and prayed out his half hour, with how much earnestness only himself and God knew.

But the result was what he had come for, a cow; for Whitcom was as good as his word, and sent him home rejoicing. And thus, with what he had earned from Wilkes, his gleaned wheat, and his cow, he contrived to get through another winter.

Perhaps the most important personal event which distinguished this year in Meek's history, was the celebration, according to the rites of the Christian church, of his marriage with the Nez Perce woman who had already borne him two children, and who still lives, the mother of a family of seven.

CHAPTER XXIV.

1842. By the opening of another spring, Meek had so far overcome his distaste for farm labor as to put in a field of wheat for himself, with Doughty, and to make some arrangements about his future subsistence. This done, he was ready, as usual, for anything in the way of adventure which might turn up. This was, however, a very quiet summer in the little colony. Important events were brooding, but as yet results were not perceptible, except to the mind of a prophet. The Hudson's Bay Company, conformably to British policy, were at work to turn the balance of power in Oregon in favor of British occupation, and, unknown even to the colonists, the United States Government was taking what measures it could to shift the balance in its own favor. Very little was said about the subject of government claims among the colonists, but a feeling of suspense oppressed all parties.

The work of putting in wheat and improving of farms had just begun to slacken a little, when there was an arrival in the Columbia River of a vessel from Boston—the *Chenamus*, Captain Couch. The *Chenamus* brought a cargo of goods, which were placed in store at Wallamet Falls, to be sold to the settlers, being the first successful attempt at trade ever made in Oregon, outside of the Hudson's Bay and Methodist Mission stores.

When the Fourth of July came, the *Chenamus* was lying in the Wallamet, below the Falls, near where the present city of Portland stands. Meek, who was always first to be at any spot where noise, bustle, or excitement might be anticipated, and whose fine humor and fund of anecdote made him always welcome, had borrowed a boat from Capt. Couch's clerk, at the Falls, and gone down to the vessel early in the morning, before the salute for the Glorious Fourth was fired. There he remained all day, enjoying a patriotic swagger, and an occasional glass of something good to drink. Other visitors came aboard during the day, which was duly celebrated to the satisfaction of all. [Pg 286]

Towards evening, a party from the Mission, wishing to return to the Falls, took possession of Meek's borrowed boat to go off with. Now was a good opportunity to show the value of free institutions. Meek, like other mountain-men, felt the distance which the missionaries placed between him and themselves, on the score of their moral and social superiority, and resented the freedom with which they appropriated what he had with some trouble secured to himself. Intercepting the party when more than half of them were seated in the boat, he informed them that they were trespassing upon a piece of property which for the present belonged to him, and for which he had a very urgent need. Vexed by the delay, and by having to relinquish the boat to a man who, according to their view of the case, could not "read his title clear," to anything either on earth or in heaven, the missionaries expostulated somewhat warmly, but Meek insisted, and so compelled them to wait for some better opportunity of leaving the ship. Then loading the boat with what was much more to the purpose—a good supply of provisions, Meek proceeded to drink the Captain's health in a very ostentatious manner, and take his leave. [Pg 287]

In the meantime, Dr. Marcus Whitman, of the Waiilatpu Mission, in the upper country, was so fearful of the intentions of the British government that he set out for Washington late in the autumn of 1842, to put the Secretary of State on his guard concerning the boundary question, and to pray that it might be settled conformably with the wishes of the Americans in Oregon.

There was one feature, however, of this otherwise rather entertaining race for possession, which was becoming quite alarming. In all this strife about claiming the country, the Indian claim had not been considered. It has been already intimated that the attempt to civilize or Christianize the Indians of western Oregon was practically an entire failure. But they were not naturally of a warlike disposition, and had been so long under the control of the Hudson's Bay Company that there was comparatively little to apprehend from them, even though they felt some discontent at the incoming immigration.

But with the Indians of the upper Columbia it was different; especially so with the tribes among whom the Presbyterian missionaries were settled—the Walla-Wallas, Cayuses, and Nez Perces, three brave and powerful nations, much united by intermarriages. The impression which these people had first made on the missionaries was very favorable, their evident intelligence, inquisitiveness, and desire for religious teachings seeming to promise a good reward of missionary labor. Dr. Whitman and his associates had been diligent in their efforts to civilize and

Christianize them—to induce the men to leave off their migratory habits and learn agriculture, and the women to learn spinning, sewing, cooking, and all the most essential arts of domestic life. At the first, the novelty of these new pursuits engaged their interest, as it also excited their hope of gain. But the task of keeping them to [Pg 288] their work with sufficient steadiness, was very great. They required, like children, to be bribed with promises of more or less immediate reward of their exertions, nor would they relinquish the fulfilment of a promise, even though they had failed to perform the conditions on which the promise became binding.

By-and-by they made the discovery that neither the missionaries could, nor the white man's God did, confer upon them what they desired—the enjoyment of all the blessings of the white men—and that if they wished to enjoy these blessings, they must labor to obtain them. This discovery was very discouraging, inasmuch as the Indian nature is decidedly averse to steady labor, and they could perceive that very little was to be expected from any progress which could be achieved in one generation. As for the Christian faith, they understood about as much of its true spirit as savages, with the law of blood written in their hearts, could be expected to understand. They looked for nothing more nor less than the literal fulfilment of the Bible promises—nothing less would content them; and as to the forms of their new religion, they liked them well enough—liked singing and praying, and certain orderly observances, the chiefs leading in these as in other matters. So much interest did they discover at first, that their teachers were deceived as to the actual extent of the good they were doing.

As time went on, however, there began to be cause for mutual dissatisfaction. The Indians became aware that no matter how many concessions their teachers made to them, they were still the inferiors of the whites, and that they must ever remain so. But the thought which produced the deepest chagrin was, that they had got these white people settled amongst them by their own invitation and aid, and that now it was evident they were not to be benefited as had been hoped, as the whites were [Pg 289] turning their attention to benefiting themselves.

As early as 1839, Mr. Smith, an associate of Mr. Spalding in the country of the Nez Perces, was forbidden by the high chief of the Nez Perces to cultivate the ground. He had been permitted to build, but was assured that if he broke the soil for the purpose of farming it, the ground so broken should serve to bury him in. Still Smith went on in the spring to prepare for ploughing, and the chief seeing him ready to begin, inquired if he recollected that he had been forbidden. Yet persisting in his undertaking, several of the Indians came to him and taking him by the shoulder asked him again "if he did not know that the hole he should make in the earth would be made to serve for his grave." Upon which third warning Smith left off, and quitted the country. Other missionaries also left for the Wallamet Valley.

In 1842 there were three mission stations in the upper country; that of Dr. Whitman at Waiilatpu on the Walla-Walla River, that of Mr. Spalding on the Clearwater River, called Lapwai, and another on the Spokane River, called Cimakain. These missions were from one hundred and twenty to three hundred miles distant from each other, and numbered altogether only about one dozen whites of both sexes. At each of these stations there was a small body of land under cultivation, a few cattle and hogs, a flouring and saw mill, and blacksmith shop, and such improvements as the needs of the mission demanded. The Indians also cultivated, under the direction of their teachers, some little patches of ground, generally but a small garden spot, and the fact that they did even so much was very creditable to those who labored to instruct them. There was no want of ardor or industry in the Presbyterian mission; on the [Pg 290] contrary they applied themselves conscientiously to the work they had undertaken.

But this conscientious discharge of duty did not give them immunity from outrage. Both Mr. Spalding and Dr. Whitman had been rudely handled by the Indians, had been struck and spat upon, and had nose and ears pulled. Even the delicate and devoted Mrs. Spalding had been grossly insulted. Later the Cayuses had assailed Dr. Whitman in his house with war-clubs, and broken down doors of communication between the private apartments and the public sitting room. Explanations and promises generally followed these acts of outrage, yet it would seem that the missionaries should have been warned.

Taking advantage of Dr. Whitman's absence, the Cayuses had frightened Mrs. Whitman from her home to the Methodist mission at the Dalles, by breaking into her bed-chamber at night, with an infamous design from which she barely escaped, and by subsequently burning down the mill and destroying a considerable quantity of grain. About the same time the Nez Perces at the Lapwai mission were very insolent, and had threatened Mr. Spalding's life; all of which, one would say, was but a poor return for the care and instruction bestowed upon them during six years of patient effort on the part of their teachers. Poor as it was, the Indians did not see it in that light, but only thought of the danger which threatened them, in the possible loss of their country.

1842-3. The plot thickened that winter, in the little drama being enacted west of the Rocky Mountains.

The forests which clad the mountains and foot-hills in perpetual verdure, and the thickets which skirted the numerous streams flowing into the Wallamet, all abounded in wild animals, whose depredations upon the domestic cattle, lately introduced into the country, were a serious drawback to their natural increase. Not a settler, owning cattle or hogs, but had been robbed more or less frequently by the wolves, bears, and panthers, which prowled unhindered in the vicinity of their herds.

This was a ground of common interest to all settlers of whatever allegiance. Accordingly, a notice was issued that a meeting would be held at a certain time and place, to consider the best means of preventing the destruction of stock in the country, and all persons interested were invited to attend. This meeting was held on the 2d of February, 1843, and was well attended by both classes of colonists. It served, however, only as a preliminary step to the regular "Wolf Association" meeting which took place a month later. At the meeting, on the 4th of March, there was a full attendance, and the utmost harmony prevailed, notwithstanding there was a well-defined suspicion in the minds of the Canadians, that they were going to be called upon to furnish protection to something more than the cattle and hogs of the settlers. [Pg 292]

After the proper parliamentary forms, and the choosing of the necessary officers for the Association, the meeting proceeded to fix the rate of bounty for each animal killed by any one out of the Association, viz: $3.00 for a large wolf; $1.50 for a lynx; $2.00 for a bear; and $5.00 for a panther. The money to pay these bounties was to be raised by subscription, and handed over to the treasurer for disbursement; the currency being drafts on Fort Vancouver, the Mission, and the Milling Company; besides wheat and other commodities.

This business being arranged, the real object of the meeting was announced in this wise:

"*Resolved*,—That a committee be appointed to take into consideration the propriety of taking measures for the civil and military protection of this colony."

A committee of twelve were then selected, and the meeting adjourned. But in that committee there was a most subtle mingling of all the elements—missionaries, mountain-men, and Canadians—an attempt by an offer of the honors, to fuse into one all the several divisions of political sentiment in Oregon.

On the 2d day of May, 1843, the committee appointed March 4th to "take into consideration the propriety of taking measures for the civil and military protection of the colony," met at Champoeg, the Canadian settlement, and presented to the people their ultimatum in favor of organizing a provisional government.

On a motion being made that the report of the committee should be accepted, it was put to vote, and lost. All was now confusion, various expressions of disappointment or gratification being mingled in one tempest of sound.

When the confusion had somewhat subsided, Mr. G.W. LeBreton made a motion that the meeting should divide; those who were in favor of an organization taking their [Pg 293] positions on the right hand; and those opposed to it on the left, marching into file. The proposition carried; and Joe Meek, who, in all this historical reminiscence we have almost lost sight of—though he had not lost sight of events—stepped to the front, with a characteristic air of the free-born American in his gait and gestures:—

"Who's for a divide! All in favor of the Report, and an Organization, follow me!"—then marched at the head of his column, which speedily fell into line, as did also the opposite party.

On counting, fifty-two were found to be on the right hand side, and fifty on the left,—so evenly were the two parties balanced at that time. When the result was made known, once more Meek's voice rang out—

"Three cheers for our side!"

It did not need a second invitation; but loud and long the shout went up for Freedom; and loudest and longest were heard the voices of the American "mountain-men." Thus the die was cast which made Oregon ultimately a member of the Federal Union.

The business of the meeting was concluded by the election of a Supreme Judge, with probate powers, a clerk of the court, a sheriff, four magistrates, four constables, a treasurer, a mayor, and a captain,—the two latter officers being instructed to form companies of mounted riflemen. In addition to these officers, a legislative committee was chosen, consisting of nine members, who were to report to the people at a public meeting to be held at Champoeg on the 5th of July following. Of the legislative committee, two were mountain-men, with whose names the reader is familiar—Newell and Doughty. Among the other appointments, was Meek, to the office of

sheriff; a position for which his personal qualities of courage and good humor admirably fitted him in the then existing state of society.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The immigration into Oregon of the year 1843, was the first since Newell and Meek, who had brought wagons through to the Columbia River; and in all numbered nearly nine hundred men, women, and children. These immigrants were mostly from Missouri and other border States. They had been assisted on their long and perilous journey by Dr. Whitman, whose knowledge of the route, and the requirements of the undertaking, made him an invaluable counselor, as he was an untiring friend of the immigrants.

At the Dalles of the Columbia the wagons were abandoned; it being too late in the season, and the wants of the immigrants too pressing, to admit of an effort being made to cut out a wagon road through the heavy timber of the Cascade mountains. Already a trail had been made over them and around the base of Mount Hood, by which cattle could be driven from the Dalles to the settlements on the Wallamet; and by this route the cattle belonging to the train, amounting to thirteen hundred, were passed over into the valley.

But for the people, especially the women and children, active and efficient help was demanded. There was something truly touching and pitiable in the appearance of these hundreds of worn-out, ragged, sun-burnt, dusty, emaciated, yet indomitable pioneers, who, after a journey of nearly two thousand miles, and of several months duration, over fertile plains, barren deserts, and rugged mountains, stood at last beside the grand and beautiful river of their hopes, exhausted by the toils of their pilgrimage, dejected and yet rejoicing. [Pg 295]

WRECKED IN THE RAPIDS.

Much they would have liked to rest, even here; but their poverty admitted of no delay. The friends to whom they were going, and from whom they must exact and receive a temporary hospitality, were still separated from them a weary and dangerous way. They delayed as little as possible, yet the fall rains came upon them, and snow fell in the mountains, so as seriously to impede the labor of driving the cattle, and hunger and sickness began to affright them.

In this unhappy situation they might have remained a long time, had there been no better dependence than the American settlers already in the valley, with the Methodist Mission at their head; for from them it does not appear that aid came, nor that any provision had been made by them to assist the expected immigrants. As usual in these crises, it was the Hudson's Bay Company who came to the rescue, and, by the offer of boats, made it possible for those families to reach the Wallamet. Not only were the Hudson's Bay Company's boats all required, but canoes and rafts were called into requisition to transport passengers and goods. No one, never having made the voyage of the Columbia from above the Dalles to Vancouver, could have an adequate idea of the perils of the passage, as it was performed in those days, by small boats and the flat-bottomed "Mackinaw" boats of the Hudson's Bay Company. The Canadian "voyageurs," who handled a boat as a good rider governs a horse, were not always able to make the passage without accident: how, then, could the clumsy landsmen, who were more used to the feel of a plow handle than an oar, be expected to do so? Numerous have been the victims suddenly clutched from life by the grasp of the whirlpools, or dashed to death among the fearful rapids of the beautiful, but wild and pitiless, Columbia. [Pg 296]

The immigration of 1843 did not escape without loss and bereavement. Three

brothers from Missouri, by the name of Applegate, with their families, were descending the river together, when, by the striking of a boat on a rock in the rapids, a number of passengers, mostly children of these gentlemen, were precipitated into the frightful current. The brothers each had a son in this boat, one of whom was lost, another injured for life, and the third escaped as by a miracle. This last boy was only ten years of age, yet such was the presence of mind and courage displayed in saving his own and a companion's life, that the miracle of his escape might be said to be his own. Being a good swimmer, he kept himself valiantly above the surface, while being tossed about for nearly two miles. Succeeding at last in grasping a feather bed which was floating near him, he might have passed the remaining rapids without serious danger, had he not been seized, as it were, by the feet, and drawn down, down, into a seething, turning, roaring abyss of water, where he was held, whirling about, and dancing up and down, striking now and then upon the rocks, until death seemed not only imminent but certain. After enduring this violent whirling and dashing for what seemed a hopelessly long period of time, he was suddenly vomited forth by the whirlpool once more upon the surface of the rapids, and, notwithstanding the bruises he had received, was able, by great exertion, to throw himself near, and seize upon a ledge of rocks. To this he clung with desperation, until, by dint of much effort, he finally drew himself out of the water, and stretched himself on the narrow shelf, where, for a moment, he swooned away. But on opening his eyes, he beheld, [Pg 297] struggling in the foaming flood, a young man who had been a passenger in the wrecked boat with himself, and who, though older, was not so good a swimmer. Calling to him with all his might, to make his voice heard above the roar of the rapids, he at last gained his attention, and encouraged him to try to reach the ledge of rocks, where he would assist him to climb up; and the almost impossible feat was really accomplished by their united efforts. This done, young Applegate sank again into momentary unconsciousness, while poor exhausted Nature recruited her forces.

But, although they were saved from immediate destruction, death still stared them in the face. That side of the river on which they had found lodgment, was bounded by precipitous mountains, coming directly down to the water. They could neither ascend nor skirt along them, for foot-hold there was none. On the other side was level ground, but to reach it they must pass through the rapids—an alternative that looked like an assurance of destruction.

In this extremity, it was the boy who resolved to risk his life to save it. Seeing that a broken ledge of rock extended nearly across the river from a point within his reach, but only coming to the surface here and there, and of course very slippery, he nevertheless determined to attempt to cross on foot, amidst the roaring rapids. Starting alone to make the experiment, he actually made the crossing in safety, amid the thundering roar and dizzying rush of waters—not only made it once, but returned to assure his companion of its practicability. The young man, however, had not the courage to undertake it, until he had repeatedly been urged to do so, and at last only by being pursuaded to go before, while his younger comrade followed after, not to [Pg 298] lose sight of him, (for it was impossible to turn around,) and directed him where to place his steps. In this manner that which appears incredible was accomplished, and the two arrived in safety on the opposite side, where they were ultimately discovered by their distressed relatives, who had believed them to be lost. Such was the battle which young Applegate had with the rocks, that the flesh was torn from the palms of his hands, and his whole body bruised and lacerated.

So it was with sorrow, after all, that the immigrants arrived in the valley. Nor were their trials over when they had arrived. The worst feature about this long and exhausting journey was, that it could not be accomplished so as to allow time for recruiting the strength of the travelers, and providing them with shelter before the rainy season set in. Either the new arrivals must camp out in the weather until a log house was thrown up, or they must, if they were invited, crowd into the small cabins of the settlers until there was scarce standing room, and thus live for months in an atmosphere which would have bred pestilence in any other less healthful climate.

Not only was the question of domiciles a trying one, but that of food still more so. Some, who had families of boys to help in the rough labor of building, soon became settled in houses of their own, more or less comfortable; nor was anything very commodious required for the frontiers-men from Missouri; but in the matter of something to eat, the more boys there were in the family, the more hopeless the situation. They had scarcely managed to bring with them provisions for their summer's journey—it was not possible to bring more. In the colony was food, but they had no money—few of them had much, at least; they had not goods to exchange; labor was not in demand: in short, the first winter in Oregon was, to nearly all the [Pg 299] new colonists, a time of trial, if not of actual suffering. Many families now occupying positions of eminence on the Pacific coast, knew what it was, in those early days, to feel the pangs of hunger, and to want for a sufficient covering for their nakedness.

Two anecdotes of this kind come to the writer's memory, as related by the parties themselves: the Indians, who are everywhere a begging race, were in the habit of visiting the houses of the settlers and demanding food. On one occasion, one of them

came to the house of a now prominent citizen of Oregon, as usual petitioning for something to eat. The lady of the house, and mother of several young children, replied that she had nothing to give. Not liking to believe her, the Indian persisted in his demand, when the lady pointed to her little children and said, "Go away; I have nothing—not even for those." The savage turned on his heel and strode quickly away, as the lady thought, offended. In a short time he reappeared with a sack of dried venison, which he laid at her feet. "Take that," he said, "and give the *tenas tillicum* (little children) something to eat." From that day, as long as he lived, that humane savage was a "friend of the family."

The other anecdote concerns a gentleman who was chief justice of Oregon under the provisional government, afterwards governor of California, and at present a banker in San Francisco. He lived, at the time spoken of on the Tualatin Plains, and was a neighbor of Joe Meek. Not having a house to go into at first, he was permitted to settle his family in the district school-house, with the understanding that on certain days of the month he was to allow religious services to be held in the building. In this he assented. Meeting day came, and the family put on their best apparel to make [Pg 300] themselves tidy in the eyes of their neighbors. Only one difficulty was hard to get over: Mr. —— had only one shoe, the other foot was bare. But he considered the matter for some time, and then resolved that he might take a sheltered position behind the teacher's desk, where his deficiency would be hidden, and when the house filled up, as it would do very rapidly, he could not be expected to stir for want of space. However, that happened to the ambitious young lawyer which often does happen to the "best laid schemes of mice and men"—his went "all aglee." In the midst of the services, the speaker needed a cup of water, and requested Mr. —— to furnish it. There was no refusing so reasonable a request. Out before all the congregation, walked the abashed and blushing pioneer, with his ill-matched feet exposed to view. This mortifying exposure was not without an agreeable result; for next day he received a present of a pair of moccasins, and was enabled thereafter to appear with feet that bore a brotherly resemblance to each other.

About this time, the same gentleman, who was, as has been said, a neighbor of Meek's, was going to Wallamet Falls with a wagon, and Meek was going along. "Take something to eat," said he to Meek, "for I have nothing;" and Meek promised that he would.

Accordingly when it came time to camp for the night, Meek was requested to produce his lunch basket. Going to the wagon, Meek unfolded an immense pumpkin, and brought it to the fire.

"What!" exclaimed Mr. ——, "is that all we have for supper?"

"Roast pumpkin is not so bad," said Meek, laughing back at him; "I've had worse fare in the mountains. It's buffalo tongue compared to ants or moccasin soles." [Pg 301]

And so with much merriment they proceeded to cut up their pumpkin and roast it, finding it as Meek had said—"not so bad" when there was no better.

These anecdotes illustrate what a volume could only describe—the perils and privations endured by the colonists in Oregon. If we add that there were only two flouring mills in the Wallamet Valley, and these two not convenient for most of the settlers, both belonging to the mission, and that to get a few bushels of wheat ground involved the taking of a journey of from four to six days, for many, and that, too, over half-broken roads, destitute of bridges, it will be seen how difficult it was to obtain the commonest comforts of life. As for such luxuries as groceries and clothing, they had to wait for better times. Lucky was the man who, "by hook or by crook," got hold of an order on the Hudson's Bay Company, the Methodist Mission, or the Milling Company at the Falls. Were he thus fortunate, he had much ado to decide how to make it go farthest, and obtain the most. Not far would it go, at the best, for fifty per cent. profit on all sales was what was demanded and obtained. Perhaps the holder of a ten dollar draft made out his list of necessaries, and presented himself at the store, expecting to get them. He wanted some unbleached cotton, to be dyed to make dresses for the children; he would buy a pair of calf-skin shoes if he could afford them; and—yes—he would indulge in the luxury of a little—a very little—sugar, just for that once!

Arrived at the store after a long, jolting journey, in the farm wagon which had crossed the continent the year before, he makes his inquiries: "Cotton goods?" "No; just out." "Shoes?" "Got one pair, rather small—wouldn't fit you." "What have you got in the way of goods?" "Got a lot of silk handkerchiefs and twelve dozen straw hats." [Pg 302] "Any pins?" "No; a few knitting needles." "Any yarn?" "Yes, there's a pretty good lot of yarn, but don't you want some sugar? the last ship that was in left a quantity of sugar." So the holder of the draft exchanges it for some yarn and a few nails, and takes the balance in sugar; fairly compelled to be luxurious in one article, for the reason that others were not to be had till some other ship came in.

No mails reached the colony, and no letters left it, except such as were carried by private hand, or were sent once a year in the Hudson's Bay Company's express to

Canada, and thence to the States. Newspapers arrived in the same manner, or by vessel from the Sandwich Islands. Notwithstanding all these drawbacks, education was encouraged even from the very beginning; a library was started, and literary societies formed, and this all the more, perhaps, that the colony was so isolated and dependent on itself for intellectual pleasures.

The spring of 1844 saw the colony in a state of some excitement on account of an attempt to introduce the manufacture of ardent spirits. This dangerous article had always been carefully excluded from the country, first by the Hudson's Bay Company, and secondly by the Methodist Mission; and since the time when a Mr. Young had been induced to relinquish its manufacture, no serious effort had been made to introduce it.

It does not appear from the Oregon archives, that any law against its manufacture existed at that time: it had probably been overlooked in the proceedings of the legislative committee of the previous summer; neither was there yet any executive head to the Provisional Government, the election not having taken place. In this dilemma the people found themselves in the month of February, when one James Conner had been discovered to be erecting a distillery at the Falls of the Wallamet. [Pg 303]

It happened, however, that an occasion for the exercise of executive power had occurred before the election of the executive committee, and now what was to be done? It was a case too, which required absolute power, for there was no law on the subject of distilleries. After some deliberation it was decided to allow the Indian agent temporary power, and several letters were addressed to him, informing him of the calamity which threatened the community at the Falls. "Now, we believe that if there is anything which calls your attention in your official capacity, or anything in which you would be most cordially supported by the good sense and prompt action of the better part of community, it is the present case. We do not wish to dictate, but we hope for the best, begging pardon for intrusions." So read the closing paragraph of one of the letters.

Perhaps this humble petition touched the Doctor's heart; perhaps he saw in the circumstance a possible means of acquiring influence; at all events he hastened to the Falls, a distance of fifty miles, and entered at once upon the discharge of the executive duties thus thrust upon him in the hour of danger. Calling upon Meek, who had entered upon his duties as sheriff the previous summer, he gave him his orders. Writ in hand, Meek proceeded to the distillery, frightened the poor sinner into quiet submission with a display of his mountain manners; made a bugle of the worm, and blew it, to announce to the Doctor his complete success; after which he tumbled the distillery apparatus into the river, and retired. Connor was put under three hundred dollar bonds, and so the case ended.

But there were other occasions on which the Doctor's authority was put in requisition. It happened that a vessel from Australia had been in the river, and left one Madam Cooper, who was said to have brought with her a barrel of whisky. Her cabin stood on the east bank of the Wallamet, opposite the present city of Portland. Not thinking it necessary to send the sheriff to deal with a woman, the Doctor went in person, accompanied by a couple of men. Entering the cabin the Doctor remarked blandly, "you have a barrel of whisky, I believe." [Pg 304]

Not knowing but her visitor's intention was to purchase, and not having previously resided in a strictly temperance community, Madam Cooper replied frankly that she had, and pointed to the barrel in question.

The Doctor then stepped forward, and placing his foot on it, said: "In the name of the United States, I levy execution on it!"

At this unexpected declaration, the English woman stared wildly one moment, then recovering herself quickly, seized the poker from the chimney corner, and raising it over the Doctor's head, exclaimed—"In the name of Great Britain, Ireland, and Scotland, I levy execution on you!"

But when the stick descended, the Doctor was not there. He had backed out at the cabin door; nor did he afterwards attempt to interfere with a subject of the crown of Great Britain.

On the following day, however, the story having got afloat at the Falls, Meek and a young man highly esteemed at the mission, by the name of Le Breton, set out to pay their respects to Madam Cooper. Upon entering the cabin, the two callers cast their eyes about until they rested on the whisky barrel.

"Have *you* come to levy on my whisky?" inquired the now suspicious Madam. [Pg 305]

"Yes," said Meek, "I have come to levy on it; but as I am not quite so high in authority as Doctor White, I don't intend to levy on the whole of it at once. I think about a quart of it will do me."

Comprehending by the twinkle in Meek's eye that she had now a customer more to

her mind, Madam Cooper made haste to set before her visitors a bottle and tin cup, upon which invitation they proceeded to levy frequently upon the contents of the bottle; and we fear that the length of time spent there, and the amount of whisky drank must have strongly reminded Meek of past rendezvous times in the mountains; nor can we doubt that he entertained Le Breton and Madam Cooper with many reminiscences of those times. However that may be, this was not the last visit of Meek to Madam Cooper's, nor his last levy on her whisky.

Shortly after his election as sheriff he had been called upon to serve a writ upon a desperate character, for an attempt to kill. Many persons, however, fearing the result of trying to enforce the law upon desperadoes, in the then defenceless condition of the colony, advised him to wait for the immigration to come in before attempting the arrest. But Meek preferred to do his duty then, and went with the writ to arrest him. The man resisted, making an attack on the sheriff with a carpenter's axe; but Meek coolly presented a pistol, assuring the culprit of the uselessness of such demonstrations, and soon brought him to terms of compliance. Such coolness, united with a fine physique, and a mountain-man's reputation for reckless courage, made it very desirable that Meek should continue to hold the office of sheriff during that stage of the colony's development.

CHAPTER XXVII.

1844. As has before been mentioned, the Indians of the Wallamet valley were by no means so formidable as those of the upper country: yet considering their numbers and the condition of the settlers, they were quite formidable enough to occasion considerable alarm when any one of them, or any number of them betrayed the savage passions by which they were temporarily overcome. Considerable excitement had prevailed among the more scattered settlers, ever since the reports of the disaffection among the up-country tribes had reached them; and Dr. White had been importuned to throw up a strong fortification in the most central part of the colony, and to procure arms for their defence, at the expense of the United States.

This excitement had somewhat subsided when an event occurred which for a time renewed it: a house was plundered and some horses stolen from the neighborhood of the Falls. An Indian from the Dalles, named Cockstock, was at the bottom of the mischief, and had been committing or instigating others to commit depredations upon the settlers, for a year previous, because he had been, as he fancied, badly treated in a matter between himself and a negro in the colony, in which the latter had taken an unfair advantage of him in a bargain.

A WILD INDIAN IN TOWN.

To crown his injuries Dr. White had caused a relative of his to be flogged by the Dalles chief, for entering the house of the Methodist missionary at that place, and tying him, with the purpose of flogging him. (It was a poor law, he thought, that would not work both ways.) [Pg 307]

In revenge for this insult Cockstock came to the Doctor's house in the Wallamet, threatening to shoot him at sight, but not finding him at home, contented himself for that time, by smashing all the windows in the dwelling and office of the Doctor, and nearly frightening to death a young man on the premises.

When on the Doctor's return in the evening, the extent of the outrage became known, a party set out in pursuit of Cockstock and his band, but failed to overtake them, and

the settlers remained in ignorance concerning the identity of the marauders. About a month later, however, a party of Klamath and Molalla Indians from the south of Oregon, numbering fifteen, came riding into the settlement, armed and painted in true Indian war-style. They made their way to the lodge of a Calapooya chief in the neighborhood—the Calapooyas being the Indians native to the valley. Dr. White fearing these mischievous visitors might infect the mind of the Calapooya chief, sent a message to him, to bring his friends to call upon him in the morning, as he had something good to say to them.

This they did, when Dr. White explained the laws of the Nez Perces to them, and told them how much it would be to their advantage to adopt such laws. He gave the Calapooya chief a fine fat ox to feast his friends with, well knowing that an Indian's humor depends much on the state of his stomach, whether shrunken or distended. After the feast there was some more talk about the laws, in the midst of which the Indian Cockstock made his appearance, armed, and sullen in his demeanor. But as Dr. White did not know him for the perpetrator of the outrage on his premises, he [Pg 308] took no notice of him more than of the others. The Molallas and Klamaths finally agreed to receive the laws; departing in high good humor, singing and shouting. So little may one know of the savage heart from the savage professions! Some of these Indians were boiling over with secret wrath at the weakness of their brethren in consenting to laws of the Agent's dictation; and while they were crossing a stream, fell upon and massacred them without mercy, Cockstock taking an active part in the murder.

The whites were naturally much excited by the villainous and horrible affray, and were for taking and hanging the murderers. The Agent, however, was more cautious, and learning that there had been feuds among these Indians long unsettled, decided not to interfere.

In February, 1844, fresh outrages on settlers having been committed so that some were leaving their claims and coming to stop at the Falls through fear, Dr. White was petitioned to take the case in hand. He accordingly raised a party of ten men, who had nearly all suffered some loss or outrage at Cockstock's hands, and set out in search of him, but did not succeed in finding him. His next step was to offer a reward of a hundred dollars for his arrest, meaning to send him to the upper country to be tried and punished by the Cayuses and Nez Perces, the Doctor prudently desiring to have them bear the odium, and suffer the punishment, should any follow, of executing justice on the Indian desperado. Not so had the fates ordained.

About a week after the reward was offered, Cockstock came riding into the settlement at the Falls, at mid-day, accompanied by five other Indians, all well armed, and frightfully painted. Going from house to house on their horses, they exhibited their pistols, and by look and gesture seemed to defy the settlers, who, [Pg 309] however, kept quiet through prudential motives. Not succeeding in provoking the whites to commence the fray, Cockstock finally retired to an Indian village on the other side of the river, where he labored to get up an insurrection, and procure the burning of the settlement houses.

Meantime the people at the Falls were thoroughly alarmed, and bent upon the capture of this desperate savage. When, after an absence of a few hours, they saw him recrossing the river with his party, a crowd of persons ran down to the landing, some with offers of large reward to any person who would attempt to take him, while others, more courageous, were determined upon earning it. No definite plan of capture or concert of action was decided on, but all was confusion and doubt. In this frame of mind a collision was sure to take place; both the whites and Indians firing at the moment of landing. Mr. LeBreton, the young man mentioned in the previous chapter, after firing ineffectually, rushed unarmed upon Cockstock, whose pistol was also empty, but who still had his knife. In the struggle both fell to the ground, when a mulatto man, who had wrongs of his own to avenge, ran up and struck Cockstock a blow on the head with the butt of his gun which dispatched him at once.

Thus the colony was rid of a scourge, yet not without loss which counterbalanced the gain. Young LeBreton besides having his arm shattered by a ball, was wounded by a poisoned arrow, which occasioned his death; and Mr. Rogers, another esteemed citizen, died from the same cause; while a third was seriously injured by a slight wound from a poisoned arrow. As for the five friends of Cockstock, they escaped to the bluffs overlooking the settlement, and commenced firing down upon the people. But fire-arms were mustered sufficient to dislodge them, and thus the affair ended; [Pg 310] except that the Agent had some trouble to settle it with the Dalles Indians, who came down in a body to demand payment for the loss of their brother. After much talk and explanation, a present to the widow of the dead Indian was made to smooth over the difficulty.

Meek, who at the time of the collision was rafting timber for Dr. McLaughlin's mill at the Falls, as might have been expected was appealed to in the melee by citizens who knew less about Indian fighting.

A prominent citizen and merchant, who probably seldom spoke *of* him as Mr. Meek,

came running to him in great affright:—"Mr. Meek! Mr. Meek! Mr. Meek!—I want to send my wife down to Vancouver. Can you assist me? Do you think the Indians will take the town?"

"It 'pears like half-a-dozen Injuns might do it," retorted Meek, going on with his work.

"What do you think we had better do, Mr. Meek?—What do you advise?"

"I think *you'd* better RUN."

In all difficulties between the Indians and settlers, Meek usually refrained from taking sides—especially from taking sides against the Indians. For Indian slayer as he had once been when a ranger of the mountains, he had too much compassion for the poor wretches in the Wallamet Valley, as well as too much knowledge of the savage nature, to like to make unnecessary war upon them. Had he been sent to take Cockstock, very probably he would have done it with little uproar; for he had sufficient influence among the Calapooyas to have enlisted them in the undertaking. But this was the Agent's business and he let him manage it; for Meek and the Doctor were not in love with one another; one was solemnly audacious, the other mischievously so. Of the latter sort of audacity, here is an example. Meek wanted a [Pg 311]
horse to ride out to the Plains where his family were, and not knowing how else to obtain it, helped himself to one belonging to Dr. White; which presumption greatly incensed the Doctor, and caused him to threaten various punishments, hanging among the rest. But the Indians overhearing him replied,

"*Wake nika cumtux*—You dare not.—You no put rope round Meek's neck. He *tyee* (chief)—no hang him."

Upon which the Doctor thought better of it, and having vented his solemn audacity, received smiling audacity with apparent good humor when he came to restore the borrowed horse.

As our friend Meek was sure to be found wherever there was anything novel or exciting transpiring, so he was sure to fall in with visitors of distinguished character, and as ready to answer their questions as they were to ask them. The conversation chanced one day to run upon the changes that had taken place in the country since the earliest settlement by the Americans, and Meek, who felt an honest pride in them, was expatiating at some length, to the ill-concealed amusement of two young officers, who probably saw nothing to admire in the rude improvements of the Oregon pioneers.

"Mr. Meek," said one of them, "if you have been so long in the country and have witnessed such wonderful transformations, doubtless you may have observed equally great ones in nature; in the rivers and mountains, for instance?"

Meek gave a lightning glance at the speaker who had so mistaken his respondent:

"I reckon I have," said he slowly. Then waving his hand gracefully toward the majestic Mt. Hood, towering thousands of feet above the summit of the Cascade range, and white with everlasting snows: "When *I* came to this country, Mount Hood [Pg 312]
was *a hole in the ground*!"

It is hardly necessary to say that the conversation terminated abruptly, amid the universal cachinations of the bystanders.

Notwithstanding the slighting views of Her British Majesty's naval officers, the young colony was making rapid strides. The population had been increased nearly eight hundred by the immigration of 1844, so that now it numbered nearly two thousand. Grain had been raised in considerable quantities, cattle and hogs had multiplied, and the farmers were in the best of spirits. Even our hero, who hated farm labor, began to entertain faith in the resources of his land claim to make him rich.

Such was the promising condition of the colony in the summer of 1845. Much of the real prosperity of the settlers was due to the determination of the majority to exclude ardent spirits and all intoxicating drinks from the country. So well had they succeeded that a gentleman writing of the colony at that time, says: "I attended the last term of the circuit courts in most of the counties, and I found great respect shown to judicial authority everywhere; nor did I see a single *drunken juryman, nor witness, nor spectator*. So much industry, good order, and sobriety I have never seen in any community."

While this was the rule, there were exceptions to it. During the spring term of the Circuit Court, Judge Nesmith being on the bench, a prisoner was arraigned before him for "assault with intent to kill." The witness for the prosecution was called, and was proceeding to give evidence, when, at some statement of his, the prisoner vociferated that he was a "d——d liar," and quickly stripping off his coat demanded a chance to fight it out with the witness. [Pg 313]

Judge Nesmith called for the interference of Meek, who had been made marshal, but

just at that moment he was not to be found. Coming into the room a moment later, Meek saw the Judge down from his bench, holding the prisoner by the collar.

"You can imagine," says Meek, "the bustle in court. But the Judge had the best of it. He fined the rascal, and made him pay it on the spot; while I just stood back to see his honor handle him. That was fun for me."

The autumn of 1845 was marked less by striking events than by the energy which the people exhibited in improving the colony by laying out roads and town-sites. Already quite a number of towns were located, in which the various branches of business were beginning to develop themselves. Oregon City was the most populous and important, but Salem, Champoeg, and Portland were known as towns, and other settlements were growing up on the Tualatin Plains and to the south of them, in the fertile valleys of the numerous tributaries to the Wallamet.

Portland was settled in this year, and received its name from the game of "heads you lose, tails I win," by which its joint owners agreed to determine it. One of them being a Maine man, was for giving it the name which it now bears, the other partner being in favor of Boston, because he was a Massachusetts man. It was, therefore, agreed between them that a copper cent should be tossed to decide the question of the christening, which being done, heads and Portland won.

The early days of that city were not always safe and pleasant any more than those of its older rivals; and the few inhabitants frequently were much annoyed by the raids they were subject to from the now thoroughly vagabondized Indians. On one occasion, while yet the population was small, they were very much annoyed by the [Pg 314] visit of eight or ten lodges of Indians, who had somewhere obtained liquor enough to get drunk on, and were enjoying a debauch in that spirit of total abandon which distinguishes the Indian carousal.

Their performances at length alarmed the people, yet no one could be found who could put an end to them. In this dilemma the Marshal came riding into town, splendidly mounted on a horse that would turn at the least touch of the rein. The countenances of the anxious Portlanders brightened. One of the town proprietors eagerly besought him to "settle those Indians." "Very well," answered Meek; "I reckon it won't take me long." Mounting his horse, after first securing a rawhide rope, he "charged" the Indian lodges, rope in hand, laying it on with force, the bare shoulders of the Indians offering good *back-grounds* for the pictures which he was rapidly executing.

Not one made any resistance, for they had a wholesome fear of *tyee* Meek. In twenty minutes not an Indian, man or woman, was left in Portland. Some jumped into the river and swam to the opposite side, and some fled to the thick woods and hid themselves. The next morning, early, the women cautiously returned and carried away their property, but the men avoided being seen again by the marshal who punished drunkenness so severely.

Reader's query. Was it Meek or the Marshal who so strongly disapproved of spreeing?

Ans. It was the Marshal.

The immigration to Oregon this year much exceeded that of any previous year; and there was the usual amount of poverty, sickness, and suffering of every sort, among the fresh arrivals. Indeed the larger the trains the greater the amount of suffering generally; since the grass was more likely to be exhausted, and more hindrances of [Pg 315] every kind were likely to occur. In any case, a march of several months through an unsettled country was sure to leave the traveler in a most forlorn and exhausted condition every way.

This was the situation of thousands of people who reached the Dalles in the autumn of 1845. Food was very scarce among them, and the difficulties to encounter before reaching the Wallamet just as great as those of the two previous years. As usual the Hudson's Bay Company came to the assistance of the immigrants, furnishing a passage down the river in their boats; the sick, and the women and children being taken first.

Among the crowd of people encamped at the Dalles, was a Mr. Rector, since well known in Oregon and California. Like many others he was destitute of provisions; his supplies having given out. Neither had he any money. In this extremity he did that which was very disagreeable to him, as one of the "prejudiced" American citizens who were instructed beforehand to hate and suspect the Hudson's Bay Company—he applied to the company's agent at the Dalles for some potatoes and flour, confessing his present inability to pay, with much shame and reluctance.

"Do not apologize, sir," said the agent kindly; "take what you need. There is no occasion to starve while our supplies hold out."

Mr. R. found his prejudices in danger of melting away under such treatment; and not

liking to receive bounty a second time, he resolved to undertake the crossing of the Cascade mountains while the more feeble of the immigrants were being boated down the Columbia. A few others who were in good health decided to accompany him. They succeeded in getting their wagons forty miles beyond the Dalles; but there they could move no further. [Pg 316]

In this dilemma, after consultation, Mr. Rector and Mr. Barlow agreed to go ahead and look out a wagon road. Taking with them two days' provisions, they started on in the direction of Oregon City. But they found road hunting in the Cascade mountains an experience unlike any they had ever had. Not only had they to contend with the usual obstacles of precipices, ravines, mountain torrents, and weary stretches of ascent and descent; but they found the forests standing so thickly that it would have been impossible to have passed between the trees with their wagons had the ground been clear of fallen timber and undergrowth. On the contrary these latter obstacles were the greatest of all. So thickly were the trunks of fallen trees crossed and recrossed everywhere, and so dense the growth of bushes in amongst them, that it was with difficulty they could force their way on foot.

It soon became apparent to the road hunters, that two days' rations would not suffice for what work they had before them. At the first camp it was agreed to live upon half rations the next day; and to divide and subdivide their food each day, only eating half of what was left from the day before, so that there would always still remain a morsel in case of dire extremity.

But the toil of getting through the woods and over the mountains proved excessive; and that, together with insufficient food, had in the course of two or three days reduced the strength of Mr. Barlow so that it was with great effort only that he could keep up with his younger and more robust companion, stumbling and falling at every few steps, and frequently hurting himself considerably.

So wolfish and cruel is the nature of men, under trying circumstances, that instead of feeling pity for his weaker and less fortunate companion, Mr. Rector became impatient, blaming him for causing delays, and often requiring assistance. [Pg 317]

THE ROAD-HUNTERS.

To render their situation still more trying, rain began to fall heavily, which with the cold air of the mountains, soon benumbed their exhausted frames. Fearing that should they go to sleep so cold and famished, they might never be able to rise again, on the fourth or fifth evening they resolved to kindle a fire, if by any means they could do so. Dry and broken wood had been plenty enough, but for the rain, which was drenching everything. Neither matches nor flint had they, however, in any case. The night was setting in black with darkness; the wind swayed the giant firs over head, and then they heard the thunder of a falling monarch of the forest unpleasantly near. Searching among the bushes, and under fallen timber for some dry leaves and sticks, Mr. Rector took a bundle of them to the most sheltered spot he could find, and set himself to work to coax a spark of fire out of two pieces of dry wood which he had split for that purpose. It [Pg 318] was a long and weary while before success was attained, by vigorous rubbing together of the dry wood, but it was attained at last; and the stiffening limbs of the road-hunters were warmed by a blazing camp-fire.

The following day, the food being now reduced to a crumb for each, the explorers, weak and dejected, toiled on in silence, Mr. Rector always in advance. On chancing to look back at his companion he observed him to be brushing away a tear. "What now, old man?" asked Mr. R. with most unchristian harshness.

"What would you do with me, Rector, should I fall and break a leg, or become in any way disabled?" inquired Mr. Barlow, nervously.

"Do with you? *I would eat you!*" growled Mr. Rector, stalking on again.

As no more was said for some time, Mr. R.'s conscience rather misgave him that he treated his friend unfeelingly; then he stole a look back at him, and beheld the wan face bathed in tears.

"Come, come, Barlow," said he more kindly, "don't take affairs so much to heart. You will not break a leg, and I should not eat you if you did, for you haven't any flesh on you to eat."

"Nevertheless, Rector, I want you to promise me that in case I should fall and disable myself, so that I cannot get on, you will not leave me here to die alone, but will kill me with your axe instead."

"Nonsense, Barlow; you are weak and nervous, but you are not going to be disabled, nor eaten, nor killed. Keep up man; we shall reach Oregon City yet."

So, onward, but ever more slowly and painfully, toiled again the pioneers, the wonder being that Mr. Barlow's fears were not realized, for the clambering and descending gave him many a tumble, the tumbles becoming more frequent as his strength declined. [Pg 319]

Towards evening of this day as they came to the precipitous bank of a mountain stream which was flowing in the direction they wished to go, suddenly there came to their ears a sound of more than celestial melody; the tinkling of bells, lowing of cattle, the voice of men hallooing to the herds. They had struck the cattle trail, which they had first diverged from in the hope of finding a road passable to wagons. In the overwhelming revulsion of feeling which seized them, neither were able for some moments to command their voices to call for assistance. That night they camped with the herdsmen, and supped in such plenty as an immigrant camp afforded.

Such were the sufferings of two individuals, out of a great crowd of sufferers; some afflicted in one way and some in another. That people who endured so much to reach their El Dorado should be the most locally patriotic people in the world, is not singular. Mr. Barlow lived to construct a wagon road over the Cascades for the use of subsequent immigrations.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

Early in 1846, Meek resigned his office of marshal of the colony, owing to the difficulty of collecting taxes; for in a thinly inhabited country, where wheat was a legal tender, at sixty cents per bushel, it was rather a burdensome occupation to collect, in so ponderous a currency; and one in which the collector required a granary more than a pocket-book. Besides, Meek had out-grown the marshalship, and aspired to become a legislator at the next June election.

He had always discharged his duty with promptitude and rectitude while sheriff; and to his known courage might be attributed, in many instances, the ready compliance with law which was remarkable in so new and peculiar an organization as that of the Oregon colony. The people had desired not to be taxed, at first; and for a year or more the government was sustained by a fund raised by subscription. When at last it was deemed best to make collections by law, the Canadians objected to taxation to support an American government, while they were still subjects of Great Britain; but ultimately yielded the point, by the advice of Dr. McLaughlin.

But it was not always the Canadians who objected to being taxed, as the following anecdote will show. Dr. McLaughlin was one day seated in his office, in conversation with some of his American friends, when the tall form of the sheriff darkened the doorway.

"I have come to tax you, Doctor," said Meek with his blandest manner, and with a merry twinkle, half suppressed, in his black eyes. [Pg 321]

"To tax me, Mr. Jo. I was not aware—I really was not aware—I believed I had paid my tax, Mr. Jo," stammered the Doctor, somewhat annoyed at the prospect of some fresh demand.

"Thar is an old ox out in my neighborhood, Doctor, and he is said to belong to you. Thar is a tax of twenty-five cents on him."

"I do not understand you, Mr. Jo. I have no cattle out in your neighborhood."

"I couldn't say how that may be, Doctor. All I do know about it, is just this. I went to old G——'s to collect the tax on his stock—and he's got a powerful lot of cattle,—and while we war a countin 'em over, he left out that old ox and said it belonged to you."

"Oh, oh, I see, Mr. Jo: yes, yes, I see! So it was Mr. G——," cried the Doctor, getting very red in the face. "I do remember now, since you bring it to my mind, that *I lent Mr. G—— that steer six years ago*! Here are the twenty-five cents, Mr. Jo."

The sheriff took his money, and went away laughing; while the Doctor's American friends looked quite as much annoyed as the Doctor himself, over the meanness of some of their countrymen.

The year of 1846 was one of the most exciting in the political history of Oregon. President Polk had at last given the notice required by the Joint occupation treaty, that the Oregon boundary question must be settled.

Agreeably to the promise which Dr. McLaughlin had received from the British Admiral, H.B.M. Sloop of war *Modeste* had arrived in the Columbia River in the month of October, 1845, and had wintered there. Much as the Doctor had wished for [Pg 322] protection from possible outbreaks, he yet felt that the presence of a British man-of-war in the Columbia, and another one in Puget Sound, was offensive to the colonists. He set himself to cover up as carefully as possible the disagreeable features of the British lion, by endeavoring to establish social intercourse between the officers of the *Modeste* and the ladies and gentlemen of the colony, and his endeavors were productive of a partial success.

During the summer, however, the United States Schooner *Shark* appeared in the Columbia, thus restoring the balance of power, for the relief of national jealousy. After remaining for some weeks, the *Shark* took her departure, but was wrecked on the bar at the mouth of the river, according to a prophecy of Meek's, who had a grudge against her commander, Lieut. Howison, for spoiling the sport he was having in company with one of her officers, while Howison was absent at the Cascades.

It appears that Lieut. Schenck was hospitably inclined, and that on receiving a visit from the hero of many bear-fights, who proved to be congenial on the subject of good liquors, he treated both Meek and himself so freely as to render discretion a foreign power to either of them. Varied and brilliant were the exploits performed by these jolly companions during the continuance of the spree; and still more brilliant were those they talked of performing, even the taking of the *Modeste*, which was lying a little way off, in front of Vancouver. Fortunately for the good of all concerned, Schenck contented himself with firing a salute as Meek was going over the side of the ship on leaving. But for this misdemeanor he was put under arrest by Howison, on his return from the Cascades, an indignity which Meek resented for the prisoner, by assuring Lieut. Howison that he would lose his vessel before he got out of the [Pg 323] river. And lose her he did. Schenck was released after the vessel struck, escaping with the other officers and crew by means of small boats. Very few articles were saved from the wreck, but among those few was the stand of colors, which Lieut. Howison subsequently presented to Gov. Abernethy for the colony.

There sinks the sun; like cavalier of old,
Servant of crafty Spain,
He flaunts his banner, barred with blood and gold,
Wide o'er the western main;
A thousand spear heads glint beyond the trees
In columns bright and long,
While kindling fancy hears upon the breeze
The swell of shout and song.

And yet not here Spain's gay, adventurous host
Dipped sword or planted cross;
The treasures guarded by this rock-bound coast
Counted them gain nor loss.
The blue Columbia, sired by the eternal hills
And wedded with the sea,
O'er golden sands, tithes from a thousand rills,
Boiled in lone majesty—

Through deep ravine, through burning, barren plain,
Through wild and rocky strait,
Through forest dark, and mountain rent in twain
Toward the sunset gate;
While curious eyes, keen with the lust of gold,
Caught not the informing gleam,
These mighty breakers age on age have rolled
To meet this mighty stream.

Age after age these noble hills have kept,
The same majestic lines;
Age after age the horizon's edge been swept
By fringe of pointed pines.
Summers and Winters circling came and went,
Bringing no change of scene;
Unresting, and unhasting, and unspent,
Dwelt Nature here serene!

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Till God's own time to plant of Freedom's seed,
In this selected soil;
Denied forever unto blood and greed,
But blest to honest toil.
There sinks the sun; Gay cavalier no more!
His banners trail the sea,
And all his legions shining on the shore
Fade into mystery.

The swelling tide laps on the shingly beach,
Like any starving thing;
And hungry breakers, white with wrath, upreach,
In a vain clamoring.
The shadows fall; just level with mine eye
Sweet Hesper stands and shines,
And shines beneath an arc of golden sky,
Pinked round with pointed pines.

A noble scene! all breadth, deep tone, and power,
Suggesting glorious themes;
Shaming the idler who would fill the hour
With unsubstantial dreams.
Be mine the dreams prophetic, shadowing forth
The things that yet shall be,
When through this gate the treasures of the North
Flow outward to the sea.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The author of the following, "poem" was not either a dull or an unobservant writer; and we insert his verses as a comical bit of natural history belonging peculiarly to Oregon.

ADVENTURES OF A COLUMBIA SALMON.

What is yon object which attracts the eye
Of the observing traveler, who ascends
Columbia's waters, when the summer sky
In one soft tint, calm nature's clothing blends:
As glittering in the sunbeams down it floats
'Till some vile vulture on its carcase gloats?

'Tis a poor salmon, which a short time past,
With thousands of her finny sisters came,
By instinct taught, to seek and find at last,
The place that gave her birth, there to remain
'Till nature's offices had been discharged,
And fry from out the ova had emerged.

Her Winter spent amongst the sheltered bays
Of the salt sea, where numerous fish of prey,
With appetite keen, the number of her days
Would soon have put an end to, could but they
Have caught her; but as they could not, she,
Spring having come, resolved to quit the sea:

And moving with the shoal along the coast, at length
She reached the outlet of her native river,
There tarried for a little to recruit her strength,
So tried of late by cold and stormy weather;
Sporting in playful gambols o'er the banks and sands,
Chasing the tiny fish frequenting there in bands.

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But ah, how little thought this simple fish,
The toils and perils she had yet to suffer,
The chance she ran of serving as a dish
For hungry white men or for Indian's supper,—
Of enemies in which the stream abounded,
When lo! she's by a fisher's net surrounded.

Partly conscious of her approaching end,
She darts with meteoric swiftness to and fro,
Striking the frail meshes, within which she's penned,

Which bid defiance to her stoutest blow:
To smaller compass by degrees the snare is drawn,
When with a leap she clears it and is gone.

Once more at large with her companions, now
Become more cautious from her late escape,
She keeps in deeper water and thinks how
Foolish she was to get in such a scrape;
As mounting further up the stream, she vies
With other fish in catching gnats and flies.

And as she on her way did thus enjoy
Life's fleeting moments, there arose a panic
Amongst the stragglers, who in haste deploy
Around their elder leaders, quick as magic,
While she unconscious of the untimely rout,
Was by a hungry otter singled out:

Vigorous was the chase, on the marked victim shot
Through the clear water, while in close pursuit
Followed her amphibious foe, who scarce had got
Near enough to grasp her, when with turns acute,
And leaps and revolutions, she so tried the otter,
He gave up the hunt with merely having bit her.

Scarce had she recovered from her weakness, when
An ancient eagle, of the bald-head kind,
Winging his dreary way to'rds some lone glen,
Where was her nest with four plump eaglets lined,
Espied the fish, which he judged quite a treat,
And just the morsel for his little ones to eat:

And sailing in spiral circles o'er the spot,
Where lay his prey, then hovering for a time,
To take his wary aim, he stooped and caught
His booty, which he carried to a lofty pine;
Upon whose topmost branches, he first adjusted
His awkward load, ere with his claws he crushed it.

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"Ill is the wind that blows no person good"—
So said the adage, and as luck would have it,
A huge grey eagle out in search of food,
Who just had whet his hunger with a rabbit,
Attacked the other, and the pair together,
In deadly combat fell into the river.

Our friend of course made off, when she'd done falling
Some sixty yards, and well indeed she might;
For ne'er, perhaps, a fish got such a mauling
Since Adam's time, or went up such a height
Into the air, and came down helter-skelter,
As did this poor production of a melter.

All these, with many other dangers, she survived,
Too manifold in this short space to mention;
So we'll suppose her to have now arrived
Safe at *the Falls*, without much more detention
Than one could look for, where so many liked her
Company, and so many Indians spiked her.

And here a mighty barrier stops her way:
The tranquil water, finding in its course
Itself beset with rising rocks, which lay
As though they said, "retire ye to your source,"
Bursts with indignant fury from its bondage, now
Rushes in foaming torrents to the chasm below.

The persevering fish then at the foot arrives,
Laboring with redoubled vigor mid the surging tide,
And finding, by her strength, she vainly strives
To overcome the flood, though o'er and o'er she tried;
Her tail takes in her mouth, and bending like a bow
That's to full compass drawn, aloft herself doth throw;

And spinning in the air, as would a silver wand
That's bended end to end and upwards cast,
Headlong she falls amid the showering waters, and
Gasping for breath, against the rocks is dashed:
Again, again she vaults, again she tries,
And in one last and feeble effort—dies.

There was, in Oregon City, a literary society called the "Falls Association," some of whose effusions were occasionally sent to the *Spectator*, and this may have been one of them. At all events, it is plain that with balls, theatres, literary societies, and politics, the colony was not afflicted with dullness, in the winter of 1846.

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But the history of the immigration this year, afforded, perhaps, more material for talk than any one other subject. The condition in which the immigrants arrived was one of great distress. A new road into the valley had been that season explored, at great labor and expense, by a company of gentlemen who had in view the aim to lessen the perils usually encountered in descending the Columbia. They believed that a better pass might be discovered through the Cascade range to the south, than that which had been found around the base of Mount Hood, and one which should bring the immigrants in at the upper end of the valley, thus saving them considerable travel and loss of time at a season of the year when the weather was apt to be unsettled.

With this design, a party had set out to explore the Cascades to the south, quite early in the spring; but failing in their undertaking, had returned. Another company was then immediately formed, headed by a prominent member of society and the legislature. This company followed the old Hudson's Bay Company's trail, crossing all those ranges of mountains perpendicular to the coast, which form a triple wall between Oregon and California, until they came out into the valley of the Humboldt, whence they proceeded along a nearly level, but chiefly barren country to Fort Hall, on the Snake River.

The route was found to be practicable, although there was a scarcity of grass and water along a portion of it; but as the explorers had with great difficulty found out and marked all the best camping grounds, and encountered first for themselves all the dangers of a hitherto unexplored region, most of which they believed they had [Pg 329] overcome, they felt no hesitation in recommending the new road to the emigrants whom they met at Fort Hall.

Being aware of the hardships which the immigrants of the previous years had undergone on the Snake River plains, at the crossing of Snake River, the John Day, and Des Chutes Rivers, and the passage of the Columbia, the travelers gladly accepted the tidings of a safer route to the Wallamet. A portion of the immigration had already gone on by the road to the Dalles; the remainder turned off by the southern route.

Of those who took the new route, a part were destined for California. All, however, after passing through the sage deserts, committed the error of stopping to recruit their cattle and horses in the fresh green valleys among the foot-hills of the mountains. It did not occur to them that they were wasting precious time in this way; but to this indulgence was owing an incredible amount of suffering. The California-bound travelers encountered the season of snow on the Sierras, and such horrors are recorded of their sufferings as it is seldom the task of ears to hear or pen to record. Snow-bound, without food, those who died of starvation were consumed by the living; even children were eaten by their once fond parents, with an indifference horrible to think on: so does the mind become degraded by great physical suffering.

The Oregon immigrants had not to cross the lofty Sierras; but they still found mountains before them which, in the dry season, would have been formidable enough. Instead, however, of the dry weather continuing, very heavy rains set in. The streams became swollen, the mountain sides heavy and slippery with the wet earth. Where the road led through canyons, men and women were sometimes forced to stem a torrent, breast high, and cold enough to chill the life in their veins. The cattle gave out, the wagons broke down, provisions became exhausted, and a few persons [Pg 330] perished, while all were in the direst straits.

The first who got through into the valley sent relief to those behind; but it was weeks before the last of the worn, weary, and now impoverished travelers escaped from the horrors of the mountains in which they were so hopelessly entangled, and where most of their worldly goods were left to rot.

The Oregon legislature met as usual, to hold its winter session, though the people hoped and expected it would be for the last time under the Provisional Government. There were only two "mountain-men" in the House, at this session—Meek and Newell.

In the suspense under which they for the present remained, there was nothing to do but to go on in the path of duty as they had heretofore done, keeping up their present form of government until it was supplanted by a better one. So passed the summer until the return of the "Glorious Fourth," which, being the first national anniversary occurring since the news of the treaty had reached the colony, was celebrated with proper enthusiasm.

It chanced that an American ship, the *Brutus*, Capt. Adams, from Boston, was lying in the Wallamet, and that a general invitation had been given to the celebrationists to visit the ship during the day. A party of fifty or sixty, including Meek and some of his mountain associates, had made their calculations to go on board at the same time, and were in fact already alongside in boats, when Captain Adams singled out a boat load of people belonging to the mission clique, and inviting them to come on board, ordered all the others off.

This was an insult too great to be borne by mountain-men, who resented it not only for themselves, but for the people's party of Americans to which they naturally belonged. Their blood was up, and without stopping to deliberate, Meek and Newell hurried off to fetch the twelve-pounder that had a few hours before served to thunder forth the rejoicings of a free people, but with which they now purposed to proclaim their indignation as freeman heinously insulted. The little twelve-pound cannon was loaded with rock, and got into range with the offending ship, and there is little doubt that Capt. Adams would have suffered loss at the hands of the incensed multitude, but for the timely interference of Dr. McLaughlin. On being informed of the warlike intentions of Meek and his associates, the good Doctor came running to the rescue, his white hair flowing back from his noble face with the hurry of his movements. [Pg 331]

"Oh, oh, Mr. Joe, Mr. Joe, you must not do this! indeed, you must not do this foolish thing! Come now; come away. You will injure your country, Mr. Joe. How can you expect that ships will come here, if they are fired on? Come away, come away!"

And Meek, ever full of waggishness, even in his wrath, replied:

"Doctor, it is not that I love the Brutus less, but my dignity more."

"Oh, Shakespeare, Mr. Joe! But come with me; come with me."

And so the good Doctor, half in authority, half in kindness, persuaded the resentful colonists to pass by the favoritism of the Boston captain.

Meek was reëlected to the legislature this summer, and swam out to a vessel lying down at the mouth of the Wallamet, to get liquor to treat his constituents; from which circumstance it may be inferred that while Oregon was remarkable for temperance, there were occasions on which conviviality was deemed justifiable by a portion of her people. [Pg 332]

Thus passed the summer. The autumn brought news of a large emigration *en route* for the new territory; but it brought no news of good import from Congress. On the contrary the bill providing for a territorial government for Oregon had failed, because the Organic Laws of that territory excluded slavery forever from the country. The history of its failure is a part and parcel of the record of the long hard struggle of the south to extend slavery into the United States' territories.

Justly dissatisfied, but not inconsolable, the colony, now that hope was extinguished for another season, returned to its own affairs. The immigration, which had arrived early this year, amounted to between four and five thousand. An unfortunate affray between the immigrants and the Indians at the Dalles, had frightened away from that station the Rev. Father Waller; and Dr. Whitman of the Waiilatpu mission had purchased the station for the Presbyterian mission, and placed a nephew of his in charge. Although, true to their original bad character, the Dalles Indians had frequently committed theft upon the passing emigration, this was the first difficulty resulting in loss of life, which had taken place. This quarrel arose out of some thefts committed by the Indians, and the unwise advice of Mr. Waller, in telling the immigrants to retaliate by taking some of the Indian horses. An Indian can see the justice of taking toll from every traveler passing through his country; but he cannot see the justice of being robbed in return; and Mr. Waller had been long enough among them to have known this.

Finding that it must continue yet a little longer to look after its own government and welfare, the colony had settled back into its wonted pursuits. The legislature had convened for its winter session, and had hardly elected its officers and read the usual message of the Governor, before there came another, which fell upon their ears like a thunderbolt. Gov. Abernethy had sent in the following letter, written at Vancouver the day before: [Pg 333]

FORT VANCOUVER, Dec. 7, 1847.

George Abernethy, Esq.;

SIR:—Having received intelligence, last night, by special express from Walla-Walla, of the destruction of the missionary settlement at Waiilatpu, by the Cayuse Indians of that place, we hasten to communicate the particulars of that dreadful event, one of the most atrocious which darkens the annals of Indian crime.

Our lamented friend, Dr. Whitman, his amiable and accomplished lady, with nine other persons, have fallen victims to the fury of these remorseless savages, who appear to have been instigated to this appalling crime by a horrible suspicion which had taken possession of their superstitious minds, in consequence of the number of deaths from dysentery and measles, that Dr. Whitman was silently working the destruction of their tribe by administering poisonous drugs, under the semblance of salutary medicines.

With a goodness of heart and benevolence truly his own, Dr. Whitman had been laboring incessantly since the appearance of the measles and dysentery among his Indian converts, to relieve their sufferings; and such has been the reward of his generous labors.

A copy of Mr. McBean's letter, herewith transmitted, will give you all the particulars known to us of this indescribably painful event.

Mr. Ogden, with a strong party, will leave this place as soon as possible for Walla-Walla, to endeavor to prevent further evil; and we beg to suggest to you the propriety of taking instant measures for the protection of the Rev. Mr. Spalding, who, for the sake of his family, ought to abandon the Clear-water mission without delay, and retire to a place of safety, as he cannot remain at that isolated station without imminent risk, in the present excited and irritable State of the Indian population.

I have the honor to be, sir, your most obedient servant,

JAMES DOUGLAS.

CHAPTER XXX.

1842-7. Doubtless the reader remembers the disquiet felt and expressed by the Indians in the upper country in the year 1842. For the time they had been quieted by presents, by the advice of the Hudson's Bay Company, and by the Agent's promise that in good time the United States would send them blankets, guns, ammunition, food farming implements, and teachers to show them how to live like the whites.

In the meantime, five years having passed, these promises had not been kept. Five times a large number of whites, with their children, their cattle, and wagons, had passed through their country, and gone down into the Wallamet Valley to settle. Now they had learned that the United States claimed the Wallamet valley; yet they had never heard that the Indians of that country had received any pay for it.

They had accepted the religion of the whites believing it would do them good; but now they were doubtful. Had they not accepted laws from the United States agent, and had not their people been punished for acts which their ancestors and themselves had always before committed at will? None of these innovations seemed to do them any good: they were disappointed. But the whites, or Bostons, (meaning the Americans) were coming more and more every year, so that by-and-by there would be all Bostons and no Indians. [Pg 335]

Once they had trusted in the words of the Americans; but now they knew how worthless were their promises. The Americans had done them much harm. Years before had not one of the missionaries suffered several of their people, and the son of one of their chiefs, to be slain in his company, yet himself escaped? Had not the son of another chief, who had gone to California to buy cattle, been killed by a party of Americans, for no fault of his own? Their chief's son was killed, the cattle robbed from his party, after having been paid for; and his friends obliged to return poor and in grief.

To be sure, Dr. White had given them some drafts to be used in obtaining cattle from the immigration, as a compensation for their losses in California; but they could not make them available; and those who wanted cattle had to go down to the Wallamet for them. In short, could the Indians have thought of an American epithet to apply to Americans, it would have been that expressive word *humbug*. What they felt and what they thought, was, that they had been cheated. They feared greater frauds in the future, and they were secretly resolved not to submit to them.

So far as regarded the missionaries, Dr. Whitman and his associates, they were divided; yet as so many looked on the Doctor as an agent in promoting the settlement of the country with whites, it was thought best to drive him from the country, together with all the missionaries. Several years before Dr. Whitman had known that the Indians were displeased with his settlement among them. They had told him of it: they had treated him with violence; they had attempted to outrage his wife; had burned his property; and had more recently several times warned him to leave their country, or they should kill him. [Pg 336]

Not that all were angry at him alike, or that any were personally very ill-disposed towards him. Everything that a man could do to instruct and elevate these savage people, he had done, to the best of his ability, together with his wife and assistants. But he had not been able, or perhaps had not attempted, to conceal the fact, that he looked upon the country as belonging to his people, rather than to the natives, and it was this fact which was at the bottom of their "bad hearts" toward the Doctor. So often had warnings been given which were disregarded by Dr. Whitman, that his friends, both at Vancouver and in the settlements, had long felt great uneasiness, and often besought him to remove to the Wallamet valley.

But although Dr. Whitman sometimes was half persuaded to give up the mission upon the representations of others, he could not quite bring himself to do so. So far as the good conduct of the Indians was concerned, they had never behaved better than for the last two years. There had been less violence, less open outrage, than formerly; and their civilization seemed to be progressing; while some few were

apparently hopeful converts. Yet there was ever a whisper in the air—"Dr. Whitman must die."

The mission at Lapwai was peculiarly successful. Mrs. Spalding, more than any other of the missionaries, had been able to adapt herself to the Indian character, and to gain their confidence. Besides, the Nez Perces were a better nation than the Cayuses;—more easily controlled by a good counsel; and it seemed like doing a wrong to abandon the work so long as any good was likely to result from it. There were other reasons too, why the missions could not be abandoned in haste, one of which was the difficulty of disposing of the property. This might have been done [Pg 337] perhaps, to the Catholics, who were establishing missions throughout the upper country; but Dr. Whitman would never have been so false to his own doctrines, as to leave the field of his labors to the Romish Church.

Yet the division of sentiment among the Indians with regard to religion, since the Catholic missionaries had come among them, increased the danger of a revolt: for in the Indian country neither two rival trading companies, nor two rival religions can long prosper side by side. The savage cannot understand the origin of so many religions. He either repudiates all, or he takes that which addresses itself to his understanding through the senses. In the latter respect, the forms of Catholicism, as adapted to the savage understanding, made that religion a dangerous rival to intellectual and idealistic Presbyterianism. But the more dangerous the rival, the greater the firmness with which Dr. Whitman would cling to his duty.

There were so many causes at work to produce a revolution among the Indians, that it would be unfair to name any one as *the* cause. The last and immediate provocation was a season of severe sickness among them. The disease was measles, and was brought in the train of the immigration.

This fact alone was enough to provoke the worst passions of the savage. The immigration in itself was a sufficient offense; the introduction through them of a pestilence, a still weightier one. It did not signify that Dr. Whitman had exerted himself night and day to give them relief. Their peculiar notions about a medicine-man made it the Doctor's duty to cure the sick; or made it the duty of the relatives of the dead and dying to avenge their deaths.

Yet in spite of all and every provocation, perhaps the fatal tragedy might have been postponed, had it not been for the evil influence of one Jo Lewis, a half-breed, who [Pg 338] had accompanied the emigration from the vicinity of Fort Hall. This Jo Lewis, with a large party of emigrants, had stopped to winter at the mission, much against Dr. Whitman's wishes; for he feared not having food enough for so many persons. Finding that he could not prevent them, he took some of the men into his employ, and among others the stranger half-breed.

This man was much about the house, and affected to relate to the Indians conversations which he heard between Dr. and Mrs. Whitman, and Mr. Spalding, who with his little daughter, was visiting at Waiilatpu. These conversations related to poisoning the Indians, in order to get them all out of the way, so that the white men could enjoy their country unmolested. Yet this devil incarnate did not convince his hearers at once of the truth of his statements; and it was resolved in the tribe to make a test of Dr. Whitman's medicine. Three persons were selected to experiment upon; two of them already sick, and the third quite well. Whether it was that the medicine was administered in too large quantities, or whether an unhappy chance so ordered it, all those three persons died. Surely it is not singular that in the savage mind this circumstance should have been deemed decisive. It was then that the decree went forth that not only the Doctor and Mrs. Whitman, but all the Americans at the mission must die.

On the 22d of November, Mr. Spalding arrived at Waiilatpu, from his mission, one hundred and twenty miles distant, with his daughter, a child of ten years, bringing with him also several horse-loads of grain, to help feed the emigrants wintering there. He found the Indians suffering very much, dying one, two, three, and sometimes five in a day. Several of the emigrant families, also, were sick with [Pg 339] measles and the dysentery, which followed the disease. A child of one of them died the day following Mr. Spalding's arrival.

Dr. Whitman's family consisted of himself and wife, a young man named Rodgers, who was employed as a teacher, and also studying for the ministry, two young people, a brother and sister, named Bulee, seven orphaned children of one family, whose parents had died on the road to Oregon in a previous year, named Sager, Helen Mar, the daughter of Joe Meek, another little half-breed girl, daughter of Bridger the fur-trader, a half-breed Spanish boy whom the Doctor had brought up from infancy, and two sons of a Mr. Manson, of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Besides these, there were half-a-dozen other families at the mission, and at the saw-mill, twenty miles distant, five families more—in all, forty-six persons at Waiilatpu, and fifteen at the mill, who were among those who suffered by the attack. But there were also about the mission, three others, Jo Lewis, Nicholas Finlay, and Joseph

Stanfield, who probably knew what was about to take place, and may, therefore be reckoned as among the conspirators.

While Mr. Spalding was at Waiilatpu, a message came from two Walla-Walla chiefs, living on the Umatilla River, to Dr. Whitman, desiring him to visit the sick in their villages, and the two friends set out together to attend to the call, on the evening of the 27th of November. Says Mr. Spalding, referring to that time: "The night was dark, and the wind and rain beat furiously upon us. But our interview was sweet. We little thought it was to be our last. With feelings of the deepest emotion we called to mind the fact, that eleven years before, we crossed this trail before arriving at Walla-Walla, the end of our seven months' journey from New York. We called to mind the [Pg 340] high hopes and thrilling interests which had been awakened during the year that followed—of our successful labors and the constant devotedness of the Indians to improvement. True, we remembered the months of deep solicitude we had, occasioned by the increasing menacing demands of the Indians for pay for their wood, their water, their air, their lands. But much of this had passed away, and the Cayuses were in a far more encouraging condition than ever before." Mr. Spalding further relates that himself and Dr. Whitman also conversed on the danger which threatened them from the Catholic influence. "We felt," he says, "that the present sickness afforded them a favorable opportunity to excite the Indians to drive us from the country, and all the movements about us seemed to indicate that this would soon be attempted, if not executed." Such was the suspicion in the minds of the Protestants. Let us hope that it was not so well founded as they believed.

The two friends arrived late at the lodge of *Stickas*, a chief, and laid down before a blazing fire to dry their drenched clothing. In the morning a good breakfast was prepared for them, consisting of beef, vegetables, and bread—all of which showed the improvement of the Indians in the art of living. The day, being Sunday, was observed with as much decorum as in a white man's house. After breakfast, Dr. Whitman crossed the river to visit the chiefs who had sent for him, namely, *Tan-i-tan*, *Five Crows*, and *Yam-ha-wa-lis*, returning about four o'clock in the afternoon, saying he had taken tea with the Catholic bishop and two priests, at their house, which belonged to *Tan-i-tan*, and that they had promised to visit him in a short time. He then departed for the mission, feeling uneasy about the sick ones at home.

Mr. Spalding remained with the intention of visiting the sick and offering consolation [Pg 341] to the dying. But he soon discovered that there was a weighty and uncomfortable secret on the mind of his entertainer, *Stickas*. After much questioning, *Stickas* admitted that the thought which troubled him was that the Americans had been "decreed against" by his people; more he could not be induced to reveal. Anxious, yet not seriously alarmed,—for these warnings had been given before many times,—he retired to his couch of skins, on the evening of the 29th, being Monday—not to sleep, however; for on either side of him an Indian woman sat down to chant the death-song —that frightful lament which announces danger and death. On being questioned they would reveal nothing.

On the following morning, Mr. Spalding could no longer remain in uncertainty, but set out for Waiilatpu. As he mounted his horse to depart, an Indian woman placed her hand on the neck of his horse to arrest him, and pretending to be arranging his head-gear, said in a low voice to the rider, "Beware of the Cayuses at the mission." Now more than ever disturbed by this intimation that it was the mission which was threatened, he hurried forward, fearing for his daughter and his friends. He proceeded without meeting any one until within sight of the lovely Walla-Walla valley, almost in sight of the mission itself, when suddenly, at a wooded spot where the trail passes through a little hollow, he beheld two horsemen advancing, whom he watched with a fluttering heart, longing for, and yet dreading, the news which the very air seemed whispering.

The two horsemen proved to be the Catholic Vicar General, Brouillet, who, with a party of priests and nuns had arrived in the country only a few months previous, and his half-breed interpreter, both of whom were known to Mr. Spalding. They each [Pg 342] drew rein as they approached, Mr. Spalding immediately inquiring "what news?"

"There are very many sick at the Whitman station," answered Brouillet, with evident embarrassment.

"How are Doctor and Mrs. Whitman?" asked Spalding anxiously.

"The Doctor is ill—is dead," added the priest reluctantly.

"And Mrs. Whitman?" gasped Spalding.

"Is dead also. The Indians have killed them."

"My daughter?" murmured the agonized questioner.

"Is safe, with the other prisoners," answered Brouillet.

"And then," says Spalding in speaking of that moment of infinite horror, when in his

imagination a picture of the massacre, of the anguish of his child, the suffering of the prisoners, of the probable destruction of his own family and mission, and his surely impending fate, all rose up before him—"I felt the world all blotted out at once, and sat on my horse as rigid as a stone, not knowing or feeling anything."

While this conversation had been going on the half-breed interpreter had kept a sinister watch over the communication, and his actions had so suspicious a look that the priest ordered him to ride on ahead. When he had obeyed, Brouillet gave some rapid instructions to Spalding; not to go near the mission, where he could do no good, but would be certainly murdered; but to fly, to hide himself until the excitement was over. The men at the mission were probably all killed; the women and children would be spared; nothing could be done at present but to try to save his own life, which the Indians were resolved to take.

The conversation was hurried, for there was no time to lose. Spalding gave his pack-horse to Brouillet, to avoid being encumbered by it; and taking some provisions [Pg 343] which the priest offered, struck off into the woods there to hide until dark. Nearly a week from this night he arrived at the Lapwai mission, starved, torn, with bleeding feet as well as broken heart. Obliged to secrete himself by day, his horse had escaped from him, leaving him to perform his night journeys on foot over the sharp rocks and prickly cactus plants, until not only his shoes had been worn out, but his feet had become cruelly lacerated. The constant fear which had preyed upon his heart of finding his family murdered, had produced fearful havoc in the life-forces; and although Mr. Spalding had the happiness of finding that the Nez Perces had been true to Mrs. Spalding, defending her from destruction, yet so great had been the first shock, and so long continued the strain, that his nervous system remained a wreck ever afterward.

MOUNT HOOD FROM THE DALLES.

CHAPTER XXXI.

1847. When Dr. Whitman reached home on that Sunday night, after parting with Mr. Spalding at the Umatilla, it was already about midnight; yet he visited the sick before retiring to rest; and early in the morning resumed his duties among them. An Indian died that morning. At his burial, which the Doctor attended, he observed that but few of the friends and relatives of the deceased were present but attributed it to the fear which the Indians have of disease.

Everything about the mission was going on as usual. Quite a number of Indians were gathered about the place; but as an ox was being butchered, the crowd was easily accounted for. Three men were dressing the beef in the yard. The afternoon session of the mission school had just commenced. The mechanics belonging to the station were about their various avocations. Young Bulee was sick in the Doctor's house. Three of the orphan children who were recovering from the measles, were with the Doctor and Mrs. Whitman in the sitting-room; and also a Mrs. Osborne, one of the emigrants who had just got up from a sick bed, and who had a sick child in her arms.

MASSACRE OF REV. DR. WHITMAN OF THE PRESBYTERIAN MISSION.

The Doctor had just come in, wearied, and dejected as it was possible for his resolute spirit to be, and had seated himself, bible in hand, when several Indians came to a side door, asking permission to come in and get some medicine. The Doctor rose, got his medicines, gave them out, and sat down again. At that moment Mrs. Whitman [Pg 345] was in an adjoining room and did not see what followed. *Tam-a-has*, a chief called "the murderer," came behind the Doctor's chair, and raising his tomahawk, struck the Doctor in the back of the head, stunning but not killing him.

Instantly there was a violent commotion. John Sager, one of the adopted children, sprang up with his pistol in his hand, but before he could fire it, he too was struck down, and cut and hacked shockingly. In the meantime Dr. Whitman had received a second blow upon the head, and now laid lifeless on the floor. Cries and confusion filled the house.

At the first sound, Mrs. Whitman, in whose ears that whisper in the air had so long sounded, began in agony to stamp upon the floor, and wring her hands, crying out, "Oh, the Indians, the Indians!" At that moment one of the women from an adjoining building came running in, gasping with terror, for the butchery was going on outside as well, and *Tam-a-has* and his associates were now assisting at it. Going to the room where the Doctor lay insensible, Mrs. Whitman and her terrified neighbor dragged him to the sofa and laid him upon it, doing all they could to revive him. To all their inquiries he answered by a whispered "no," probably not conscious what was said.

While this was being done, the people from every quarter began to crowd into the Doctor's house, many of them wounded. Outside were heard the shrieks of women, the yells of the Indians, the roar of musketry, the noise of furious riding, of meeting war-clubs, groans, and every frightful combination of sound, such as only could be heard at such a carnival of blood. Still Mrs. Whitman sat by her husband's side, intent on trying to rouse him to say one coherent word.

Nearer and nearer came the struggle, and she heard some one exclaim that two of [Pg 346] her friends were being murdered beneath the window. Starting up, she approached the casement to get a view, as if by looking she could save; but that moment she encountered the fiendish gaze of Jo Lewis the half-breed, and comprehended his guilt. "Is it *you*, Jo, who are doing this?" she cried. Before the expression of horror had left her lips, a young Indian who had been a special favorite about the mission, drew up his gun and fired, the ball entering her right breast, when she fell without a groan.

When the people had at first rushed in, Mrs. Whitman had ordered the doors fastened and the sick children removed to a room up stairs. Thither now she was herself conveyed, having first recovered sufficiently to stagger to the sofa where lay her dying husband. Those who witnessed this strange scene, say that she knelt and prayed—prayed for the orphan children she was leaving, and for her aged parents. The only expression of personal regret she was heard to utter, was sorrow that her father and mother should live to know she had perished in such a manner.

In the chamber were now gathered Mrs. Whitman, Mrs. Hayes, Miss Bulee, Catharine Sager, thirteen years of age, and three of the sick children, besides Mr. Rogers and Mr. Kimble. Scarcely had they gained this retreat when the crashing of windows and doors was heard below, and with whoops and yells the savages dashed into the sitting-room where Doctor Whitman still lay dying. While some busied themselves removing from the house the goods and furniture, a chief named *Te-lau-ka-ikt*, a favorite at the mission, and on probation for admission into the church, deliberately chopped and mangled the face of his still breathing teacher and friend with his tomahawk, until every feature was rendered unrecognizable. [Pg 347]

The children from the school-house were brought into the kitchen of the Doctor's house about this time, by Jo Lewis, where, he told them, they were going to be shot.

Mr. Spalding's little girl Eliza, was among them. Understanding the native language, she was fully aware of the terrible import of what was being said by their tormentors. While the Indians talked of shooting the children huddled together in the kitchen, pointing their guns, and yelling, Eliza covered her face with her apron, and leaned over upon the sink, that she might not see them shoot her. After being tortured in this manner for some time, the children were finally ordered out of doors.

While this was going on, a chief called *Tamt-sak-y*, was trying to induce Mrs. Whitman to come down into the sitting-room.

She replied that she was wounded and could not do so, upon which he professed much sorrow, and still desired her to be brought down, "If you are my friend *Tamt-sak-y*, come up and see me," was her reply to his professions, but he objected, saying there were Americans concealed in the chamber, whom he feared might kill him. Mr. Rogers then went to the head of the stairs and endeavored to have the chief come up, hoping there might be some friendly ones, who would aid them in escaping from the murderers. *Tamt-sak-y*, however, would not come up the stairs, although he persisted in saying that Mrs. Whitman should not be harmed, and that if all would come down and go over to the other house where the families were collected, they might do so in safety.

The Indians below now began to call out that they were going to burn the Doctor's house. Then no alternative remained but to descend and trust to the mercy of the savages. As Mrs. Whitman entered the sitting-room, leaning on one arm of Mr. Rogers, who also was wounded in the head, and had a broken arm, she caught a view [Pg 348] of the shockingly mutilated face of her husband and fell fainting upon the sofa, just as Doctor Whitman gave a dying gasp.

Mr. Rogers and Mrs. Hayes now attempted to get the sofa, or settee, out of the house, and had succeeded in moving it through the kitchen to the door. No sooner did they appear in the open door-way than a volley of balls assailed them. Mr. Rogers fell at once, but did not die immediately, for one of the most horrid features in this horrid butchery was, that the victims were murdered by torturing degrees. Mrs. Whitman also received several gunshot wounds, lying on the settee. Francis Sager, the oldest of her adopted boys, was dragged into the group of dying ones and shot down.

The children, who had been turned out of the kitchen were still huddled together about the kitchen door, so near to this awful scene that every incident was known to them, so near that the flashes from the guns of the Indians burnt their hair, and the odor of the blood and the burning powder almost suffocated them.

At two o'clock in the afternoon the massacre had commenced. It was now growing dusk, and the demons were eager to finish their work. Seeing that life still lingered in the mangled bodies of their victims, they finished their atrocities by hurling them in the mud and gore which filled the yard, and beating them upon their faces with whips and clubs, while the air was filled with the noise of their shouting, singing, and dancing—the Indian women and children assisting at these orgies, as if the Bible had never been preached to them. And thus, after eleven years of patient endeavor to save some heathen souls alive, perished Doctor and Mrs. Whitman.

In all that number of Indians who had received daily kindnesses at the hands of the missionaries, only two showed any compassion. These two, *Ups* and *Madpool*, Walla- [Pg 349] Wallas, who were employed by the Doctor, took the children away from the sickening sights that surrounded them, into the kitchen pantry, and there in secret tried to comfort them.

When night set in the children and families were all removed to the building called the mansion-house, where they spent a night of horror; all, except those who were left in Mrs. Whitman's chamber, from which they dared not descend, and the family of Mr. Osborne, who escaped.

On the first assault Mr. and Mrs. Osborne ran into their bedroom which adjoined the sitting-room, taking with them their three small children. Raising a plank in the floor, Mr. O. quickly thrust his wife and children into the space beneath, and then following, let the plank down to its place. Here they remained until darkness set in, able to hear all that was passing about them, and fearing to stir. When all was quiet at the Doctor's house, they stole out under cover of darkness and succeeded in reaching Fort Walla-Walla, after a painful journey of several days, or rather nights, for they dared not travel by day.

Another person who escaped was a Mr. Hall, carpenter, who in a hand to hand contest with an Indian, received a wound in the face, but finally reached the cover of some bushes where he remained until dark, and then fled in the direction of Fort Walla-Walla. Mr. Hall was the first to arrive at the fort, where, contrary to his expectations, and to all humanity, he was but coldly received by the gentleman in charge, Mr. McBean.

Whether it was from cowardice or cruelty as some alleged, that Mr. McBean rejoiced

in the slaughter of the Protestant missionaries, himself being a Catholic, can never be known. Had that been true, one might have supposed that their death would have been enough, and that he might have sheltered a wounded man fleeing for his life, [Pg 350] without grudging him this atom of comfort. Unfortunately for Mr. McBean's reputation, he declined to grant such shelter willingly. Mr. Hall remained, however, twelve hours, until he heard a report that the women and children were murdered, when, knowing how unwelcome he was, and being in a half distracted state, he consented to be set across the Columbia to make his way as best he could to the Wallamet. From this hour he was never seen or heard from, the manner of his death remaining a mystery to his wife and their family of five children, who were among the prisoners at Waiilatpu.

When Mr. Osborne left the mission in the darkness, he was able only to proceed about two miles, before Mrs. Osborne's strength gave way, she lately having been confined by an untimely birth; and he was compelled to stop, secreting himself and family in some bushes. Here they remained, suffering with cold, and insufficient food, having only a little bread and cold mush which they had found in the pantry of the Doctor's house, before leaving it. On Tuesday night, Mrs. O. was able to move about three miles more: and again they were compelled to stop. In this way to proceed, they must all perish of starvation; therefore on Wednesday night Mr. O. took the second child and started with it for the fort, where he arrived before noon on Thursday.

Although Mr. McBean received him with friendliness of manner, he refused him horses to go for Mrs. Osborne and his other children, and even refused to furnish food to relieve their hunger, telling him to go to the Umatilla, and forbidding his return to the fort. A little food was given to himself and child, who had been fasting since Monday night. Whether Mr. McBean would have allowed this man to perish is uncertain: but certain it is that some base or cowardly motive made him exceedingly [Pg 351] cruel to both Hall and Osborne.

While Mr. Osborne was partaking of his tea and crackers, there arrived at the fort Mr. Stanley, the artist, whom the reader will remember having met in the mountains several years before. When the case became known to him, he offered his horses immediately to go for Mrs. Osborne. Shamed into an appearance of humanity, Mr. McBean then furnished an Indian guide to accompany Mr. O. to the Umatilla, where he still insisted the fugitives should go, though this was in the murderer's country.

A little meat and a few crackers were furnished for the supper of the travelers; and with a handkerchief for his hatless head and a pair of socks for his child's naked feet, all furnished by Mr. Stanley, Mr. Osborne set out to return to his suffering wife and children. He and his guide traveled rapidly, arriving in good time near the spot where he believed his family to be concealed. But the darkness had confused his recollection, and after beating the bushes until daylight, the unhappy husband and father was about to give up the search in despair, when his guide at length discovered their retreat.

The poor mother and children were barely alive, having suffered much from famine and exposure, to say nothing of their fears. Mrs. Osborne was compelled to be tied to the Indian in order to sit her horse. In this condition the miserable fugitives turned toward the Umatilla, in obedience to the command of McBean, and were only saved from being murdered by a Cayuse by the scornful words of the guide, who shamed the murderer from his purpose of slaughtering a sick and defenceless family. At a Canadian farm-house, where they stopped to change horses, they were but roughly received; and learning here that *Tamt-sak-y's* lodge was near by, Mrs. Osborne [Pg 352] refused to proceed any farther toward the Umatilla. She said, "I doubt if I can live to reach the Umatilla; and if I must die, I may as well die at the gates of the Fort. Let us, then, turn back to the Fort."

To this the guide assented, saying it was not safe going among the Cayuses. The little party, quite exhausted, reached Walla-Walla about ten o'clock at night, and were at once admitted. Contrary to his former course, Mr. McBean now ordered a fire made to warm the benumbed travelers, who, after being made tolerably comfortable, were placed in a secret room of the fort. Again Mr. Osborne was importuned to go away, down to the Wallamet, Mr. McBean promising to take care of his family and furnish him an outfit if he would do so. Upon being asked to furnish a boat, and Indians to man it, in order that the family might accompany him, he replied that his Indians refused to go.

From all this reluctance, not only on the part of McBean, but of the Indians also, to do any act which appeared like befriending the Americans, it would appear that there was a very general fear of the Cayuse Indians, and a belief that they were about to inaugurate a general war upon the Americans, and their friends and allies. Mr. Osborne, however, refused to leave his family behind, and Mr. McBean was forced to let him remain until relief came. When it did come at last, in the shape of Mr. Ogden's party, *Stickas*, the chief who had warned Mr. Spalding, showed his kind feeling for the sufferers by removing his own cap and placing it on Mr. Osborne's

head, and by tying a handkerchief over the ears of Mr. Osborne's little son, as he said, "to keep him warm, going down the river." Sadly indeed, did the little ones who suffered by the massacre at Waiilatpu, stand in need of any Christian kindness.

CHAPTER XXXII.

1847. A full account of the horrors of the Waiilatpu massacre, together with the individual sufferings of the captives whose lives were spared, would fill a volume, and be harrowing to the reader; therefore, only so much of it will be given here as, from its bearing upon Oregon history, is important to our narrative.

The day following the massacre, being Tuesday, was the day on which Mr. Spalding was met and warned not to go to the mission, by the Vicar General, Brouillet. Happening at the mission on that day, and finding the bodies of the victims still unburied, Brouillet had them hastily interred before leaving, if interment it could be called which left them still a prey to wolves. The reader of this chapter of Oregon history will always be very much puzzled to understand by what means the Catholic priests procured their perfect exemption from harm during this time of terror to the Americans. Was it that they were French, and that they came into the country *only* as missionaries of a religion adapted to the savage mind, and not as settlers? Was it at all owing to the fact that they were celibates, with no families to excite jealous feelings of comparison in the minds of their converts?

Through a long and bitter war of words, which followed the massacre at Waiilatpu, terrible sins were charged upon the priests—no less than inciting the Indians to the murder of the Protestants, and winking at the atrocities of every kind committed by [Pg 354] the savages. Whether they feared to enter into the quarrel, and were restrained from showing sympathy solely by this fear, is a question only themselves can determine. Certain it is, that they preserved a neutral position, when to be neutral was to seem, if not to be, devoid of human sympathies. That the event would have happened without any other provocation than such as the Americans furnished by their own reckless disregard of Indian prejudices, seems evident. The question, and the only question which is suggested by a knowledge of all the circumstances, is whether the event was helped on by an intelligent outside influence.

It was quite natural that the Protestants should wonder at the immunity from danger which the priests enjoyed; and that, not clearly seeing the reason, they should suspect them of collusion with the Indians. It was natural, too, for the sufferers from the massacre to look for some expression of sympathy from any and all denominations of Christians; and that, not receiving it, they should have doubts of the motives which prompted such reserve. The story of that time is but an unpleasant record, and had best be lightly touched upon.

The work of death and destruction did not close with the first day at Waiilatpu. Mr. Kimble, who had remained in the chamber of the Doctor's house all night, had suffered much from the pain of his broken arm. On Tuesday, driven desperate by his own sufferings, and those of the three sick children with him, one of whom was the little Helen Mar Meek, he resolved to procure some water from the stream which ran near the house. But he had not proceeded more than a few rods before he was shot down and killed instantly. The same day, a Mr. Young, from the saw-mill, was also killed. In the course of the week, Mr. Bulee, who was sick over at the mansion, was brutally murdered. [Pg 355]

Meanwhile the female captives and children were enduring such agony as seldom falls to the lot of humanity to suffer. Compelled to work for the Indians, their feelings were continually harrowed up by the terrible sights which everywhere met their eyes in going back and forth between the houses, in carrying water from the stream, or moving in any direction whatever. For the dead were not removed until the setting in of decay made it necessary to the Indians themselves.

The goods belonging to the mission were taken from the store-room, and the older women ordered to make them up into clothing for the Indians. The buildings were plundered of everything which the Indians coveted; all the rest of their contents that could not be made useful to themselves were destroyed. Those of the captives who were sick were not allowed proper attention, and in a day or two Helen Mar Meek died of neglect.

Thus passed four or five days. On Saturday a new horror was added to the others. The savages began to carry off the young women for wives. Three were thus dragged away to Indian lodges to suffer tortures worse than death. One young girl, a daughter of Mr. Kimble, was taken possession of by the murderer of her father, who took daily delight in reminding her of that fact, and when her sorrow could no longer be restrained, only threatened to exchange her for another young girl who was also a wife by compulsion.

Miss Bulee, the eldest of the young women at the mission, and who was a teacher in the mission school, was taken to the Umatilla, to the lodge of *Five-Crows*. As has before been related, there was a house on the Umatilla belonging to *Tan-i-tan*, in which were residing at this time two Catholic priests—the Vicar-General Brouillet, and Blanchet, Bishop of Walla-Walla. To this house Miss Bulee applied for protection, [Pg 356] and was refused, whether from fear, or from the motives subsequently attributed to them by some Protestant writers in Oregon, is not known to any but themselves. The only thing certain about it is, that Miss Bulee was allowed to be violently dragged from their presence every night, to return to them weeping in the morning, and to have her entreaties for their assistance answered by assurances from them that the wisest course for her was to submit. And this continued for more than two weeks, until the news of Mr. Ogden's arrival at Walla-Walla became known, when Miss Bulee was told that if *Five-Crows* would not allow her to remain at their house altogether, she must remain at the lodge of *Five-Crows* without coming to their house at all, well knowing what *Five-Crows* would do, but wishing to have Miss Bulee's action seem voluntary, from shame perhaps, at their own cowardice. Yet the reason they gave ought to go for all it is worth—that they being priests could not have a woman about their house. In this unhappy situation did the female captives spend three most miserable weeks.

In the meantime the mission at Lapwai had been broken up, but not destroyed, nor had any one suffered death as was at first feared. The intelligence of the massacre at Waiilatpu was first conveyed to Mrs. Spalding by a Mr. Camfield, who at the breaking out of the massacre, fled with his wife and children to a small room in the attic of the mansion, from the window of which he was able to behold the scenes which followed. When night came Mr. Camfield contrived to elude observation and descend into the yard, where he encountered a French Canadian long in the employ of Dr. Whitman, and since suspected to have been privy to the plan of the murders. To him Mr. Camfield confided his intention to escape, and obtained a promise that a horse should be brought to a certain place at a certain time for his use. But the [Pg 357] Canadian failing to appear with his horse, Mr. C. set out on foot, and under cover of night, in the direction of the Lapwai mission. He arrived in the Nez Perce country on Thursday. On the following day he came upon a camp of these people, and procured from them a guide to Lapwai, without, however, speaking of what had occurred at Waiilatpu.

The caution of Mr. Camfield relates to a trait of Indian character which the reader of Indian history must bear in mind, that is, the close relationship and identity of feeling of allied tribes. Why he did not inform the Nez Perces of the deed done by their relatives, the Cayuses, was because in that case he would have expected them to have sympathized with their allies, even to the point of making him a prisoner, or of taking his life. It is this fact concerning the Indian character, which alone furnishes an excuse for the conduct of Mr. McBean and the Catholic priests. Upon it Mr. Camfield acted, making no sign of fear, nor betraying any knowledge of the terrible matter on his mind to the Nez Perces.

On Saturday afternoon Mr. C. arrived at Mrs. Spalding's house and dismissed his guide with the present of a buffalo robe. When he was alone with Mrs. Spalding he told his unhappy secret. It was then that the strength and firmness of Mrs. Spalding's character displayed itself in her decisive action. Well enough she knew the close bond between the Nez Perces and Cayuses, and also the treachery of the Indian character. But she saw that if affairs were left to shape themselves as Mr. Camfield entreated they might be left to do, putting off the evil day,—that when the news came from the Cayuses, there would be an outbreak.

The only chance of averting this danger was to inform the chiefs most attached to her, at once, and throw herself and her family upon their mercy. Her resolution was [Pg 358] taken not an hour too soon. Two of the chiefs most relied upon happened to be at the place that very afternoon, one of whom was called *Jacob*, and the other *Eagle*. To these two Mrs. Spalding confided the news without delay, and took counsel of them. According to her hopes, they assumed the responsibility of protecting her. One of them went to inform his camp, and give them orders to stand by Mrs. S., while the other carried a note to Mr. Craig, one of our Rocky Mountain acquaintances, who lived ten miles from the mission.

Jacob and *Eagle*, with two other friendly chiefs, decided that Mrs. S. must go to their camp near Mr. Craig's; because in case the Cayuses came to the mission as was to be expected, she would be safer with them. Mrs. S. however would not consent to make the move on the Sabbath, but begged to be allowed to remain quiet until Monday. Late Saturday evening Mr. Craig came down; and Mrs. Spalding endeavored with his assistance to induce the Indians to carry an express to Cimikain in the country of the Spokanes, where Messrs. Walker and Eells had a station. Not an Indian could be persuaded to go. An effort, also, was made by the heroic and suffering wife and mother, to send an express to Waiilatpu to learn the fate of her daughter, and if possible of her husband. But the Indians were none of them inclined to go. They said, without doubt all the women and children were slain. That Mr. Spalding was alive no

one believed.

The reply of Mrs. S. to their objections was that she could not believe that they were her friends if they would not undertake this journey, for the relief of her feelings under such circumstances. At length *Eagle* consented to go; but so much opposed were the others to having anything done which their relations, the Cayuses, might be displeased with, that it was nearly twenty-four hours before *Eagle* got leave to go. [Pg 359]

On Monday morning a Nez Perce arrived from Waiilatpu with the news of what the Cayuses had done. With him were a number of Indians from the camp where Mr. Camfield had stopped for a guide, all eager for plunder, and for murder too, had not they found Mrs. Spalding protected by several chiefs. Her removal to their camp probably saved her from the fate of Mrs. Whitman.

Among those foremost in plundering the mission buildings at Lapwai were some of the hitherto most exemplary Indians among the Nez Perces. Even the chief, first in authority after Ellis, who was absent, was prominent in these robberies. For eight years had this chief, Joseph, been a member of the church at Lapwai, and sustained a good reputation during that time. How bitter must have been the feelings of Mrs. Spalding, who had a truly devoted missionary heart, when she beheld the fruit of her life's labor turned to ashes in her sight as it was by the conduct of Joseph and his family.

Shortly after the removal of Mrs. Spalding, and the pillaging of the buildings, Mr. Spalding arrived at Lapwai from his long and painful journey during which he had wandered much out of his way, and suffered many things. His appearance was the signal for earnest consultations among the Nez Perces who were not certain that they might safely give protection to him without the consent of the Cayuses. To his petition that they should carry a letter express to Fort Colville or Fort Walla-Walla, they would not consent. Their reason for refusing seemed to be a fear that such a letter might be answered by an armed body of Americans, who would come to avenge the deaths of their countrymen.

To deprive them of this suspicion, Mr. Spalding told them that as he had been robbed of everything, he had no means of paying them for their services to his family, and that it was necessary to write to Walla-Walla for blankets, and to the Umatilla for his horses. He assured them that he would write to his countrymen to keep quiet, and that they had nothing to fear from the Americans. The truth was, however, that he had forwarded through Brouillet, a letter to Gov. Abernethy asking for help which could only come into that hostile country armed and equipped for war. [Pg 360]

Late in the month of December there arrived in Oregon City to be delivered to the governor, sixty-two captives, bought from the Cayuses and Nez Perces by Hudson's Bay blankets and goods; and obtained at that price by Hudson's Bay influence. "No other power on earth," says Joe Meek, the American, "could have rescued those prisoners from the hands of the Indians;" and no man better than Mr. Meek understood the Indian character, or the Hudson's Bay Company's power over them.

The number of victims to the Waiilatpu massacre was fourteen. None escaped who had not to mourn a father, brother, son, or friend. If "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," there ought to arise on the site of Waiilatpu a generation of extraordinary piety. As for the people for whom a noble man and woman, and numbers of innocent persons were sacrificed, they have returned to their traditions; with the exception of the Nez Perces, who under the leadership of their old teacher Mr. Spalding, have once more resumed the pursuits of civilized and Christianized nations.

The description of Waiilatpu at the present time given on the following page, is from "*All Over Oregon and Washington*" by the author of this book. [Pg 361]

"Waiilatpu is just that—a creek-bottom—the creeks on either side of it fringed with trees; higher land shutting out the view in front; isolation and solitude the most striking features of the place. Yet here came a man and a woman to live and to labor among the savages, when all the old Oregon territory was an Indian country. Here stood the station erected by them: *adobe* houses, a mill, a school-house for the Indians, shops, and all the necessary appurtenances of an isolated settlement. Nothing remains to-day but mounds of earth, into which the *adobes* were dissolved by weather, after burning.

"A few rods away, on the side of the hill, is a different mound: the common grave of fourteen victims of savage superstition, jealousy, and wrath. It is roughly inclosed by a board fence, and has not a shrub or a flower to disguise its terrible significance. The most affecting reminders of wasted effort which remain on the old Mission-grounds are the two or three apple-trees which escaped the general destruction, and the scarlet poppies which are scattered broadcast through the creek-bottom near the houses. Sadly significant it is that the flower whose evanescent bloom is the symbol of unenduring joys, should be the only tangible witness left of the womanly tastes and labors of the devoted Missionary who gave her life a sacrifice to ungrateful

Indian savagery.

"The place is occupied, at present, by one of Dr. Whitman's early friends and co-laborers, who claimed the Mission-ground, under the Donation Act, and who was first and most active in founding the seminary to the memory of a Christian gentleman and martyr. On the identical spot where stood the Doctor's residence, now stands the more modern one of his friend; and he seems to take a melancholy pleasure in keeping in remembrance the events of that unhappy time, which threw a gloom over the whole territory west of the Rocky Mountains."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

1847-8. When the contents of Mr. Douglas' letter to the governor became known to the citizens of the Wallamet settlement, the greatest excitement prevailed. On the reading of that letter, and those accompanying it, before the House, a resolution was immediately introduced authorizing the governor to raise a company of riflemen, not to exceed fifty in number, to occupy and hold the mission station at the Dalles, until a larger force could be raised, and such measures adopted as the government might think advisable. This resolution being sent to the governor without delay, received his approval, when the House adjourned.

A large meeting of the citizens was held that evening, which was addressed by several gentlemen, among whom was Meek, whose taste for Indian fighting was whetted to keenness by the aggravating circumstances of the Waiilatpu massacre, and the fact that his little Helen Mar was among the captives. Impatient as was Meek to avenge the murders, he was too good a mountain-man to give any rash advice. All that could be done under the existing circumstances was to trust to the Hudson's Bay Company for the rescue of the prisoners, and to take such means for defending the settlements as the people in their unarmed condition could devise.

The legislature undertook the settlement of the question of ways and means. To raise money for the carrying out of the most important measures immediately, was a task [Pg 363] which after some consideration was entrusted to three commissioners; and by these commissioners letters were addressed to the Hudson's Bay Company, the superintendent of the Methodist mission, and to the "merchants and citizens of Oregon." The latter communication is valuable as fully explaining the position of affairs at that time in Oregon. It is dated Dec. 17th, and was as follows:

> GENTLEMEN:—You are aware that the undersigned have been charged by the legislature of our provisional government with the difficult duty of obtaining the necessary means to arm, equip, and support in the field a force sufficient to obtain full satisfaction of the Cayuse Indians, for the late massacre at Waiilatpu, and to protect the white population of our common country from further aggression.
>
> In furtherance of this object they have deemed it their duty to make immediate application to the merchants and citizens of the country for the requisite assistance.
>
> Though clothed with the power to pledge, to the fullest extent, the faith and means of the present government of Oregon, they do not consider this pledge the only security to those who, in this distressing emergency, may extend to the people of this country the means of protection and redress.
>
> Without claiming any special authority from the government of the United States to contract a debt to be liquidated by that power, yet, from all precedents of like character in the history of our country, the undersigned feel confident that the United States government will regard the murder of the late Dr. Whitman and his lady, as a national wrong, and will fully justify the people of Oregon in taking active measures to obtain redress for that outrage, and for their protection from further aggression.
>
> The right of self-defence is tacitly acknowledged to every body politic in the confederacy to which we claim to belong, and in every case similar to our own, within our knowledge, the general government has promptly assumed the payment of all liabilities growing out of the measures taken by the constituted authorities, to protect the lives and property of those who reside within the limits of their districts.
>
> If the citizens of the States and territories, east of the Rocky mountains, are justified in promptly acting in such emergencies, who are under the immediate protection of the general government, there appears no room for doubt that the lawful acts of the Oregon government will receive a like approval.
>
> Though the Indians of the Columbia have committed a great outrage upon our fellow citizens passing through their country, and residing among them, and their [Pg 364] punishment for these murders may, and ought to be, a prime object with every citizen of Oregon, yet, as that duty more particularly devolves upon the government of the United States, and admits of delay, we do not make this the strongest ground upon which to found our earnest appeal to you for pecuniary assistance. It is a fact well known to every person acquainted with the Indian character, that, by passing silently over their repeated thefts, robberies, and murders of our fellow-citizens, they have been emboldened to the commission of the appalling massacre at Waiilatpu. They call us women, destitute of the hearts and courage of men, and if we allow this wholesale

murder to pass by as former aggressions, who can tell how long either life or property will be secure in any part of this country, or what moment the Willamette will be the scene of blood and carnage.

The officers of our provisional government have nobly performed their duty. None can doubt the readiness of the patriotic sons of the west to offer their personal services in defence of a cause so righteous. So it now rests with you, gentlemen, to say whether our rights and our fire-sides shall be defended, or not.

Hoping that none will be found to falter in so high and so sacred a duty, we beg leave, gentlemen, to subscribe ourselves,

Your servants and fellow-citizens,

JESSE APPLEGATE,
A.L. LOVEJOY,
GEO. L. CURRY,
Commissioners.

A similar letter had been addressed to the Hudson's Bay Company, and to the Methodist mission. From each of these sources such assistance was obtained as enabled the colony to arm and equip the first regiment of Oregon riflemen, which in the month of January proceeded to the Cayuse country. The amount raised, however, was very small, being less than five thousand dollars, and it became imperatively necessary that the government of the United States should be called upon to extend its aid and protection to the loyal but distressed young territory.

In view of this necessity it was resolved in the legislature to send a messenger to carry the intelligence of the massacre to Gov. Mason of California, and through him to the commander of the United States squadron in the Pacific, that a vessel of war might be sent into the Columbia River, and arms and ammunition borrowed for the present emergency, from the nearest arsenal. For this duty was chosen Jesse Applegate, Esq., a gentleman who combined in his character and person the ability of the statesman with the sagacity and strength of the pioneer. Mr. Applegate, with a small party of brave men, set out in midwinter to cross the mountains into California, but such was the depth of snow they encountered that traveling became impossible, even after abandoning their horses, and they were compelled to return. [Pg 365]

The messenger elected to proceed to the United States was Joseph L. Meek, whose Rocky Mountain experiences eminently fitted him to encounter the dangers of such a winter journey, and whose manliness, firmness, and ready wit stood him instead of statesmanship.

On the 17th December Meek resigned his seat in the House in order to prepare for the discharge of his duty as messenger to the United States. On the 4th of January, armed with his credentials from the Oregon legislature, and bearing dispatches from that body and the Governor to the President, he at length set out on the long and perilous expedition, having for traveling companions Mr. John Owens, and Mr. George Ebbarts—the latter having formerly been a Rocky Mountain man, like himself.

At the Dalles they found the first regiment of Oregon Riflemen, under Major Lee, of the newly created army of Oregon. From the reports which the Dalles Indians brought in of the hostility of the Indians beyond the Des Chutes River it was thought best not to proceed before the arrival of the remainder of the army, when all the forces would proceed at once to Waiilatpu. Owing to various delays, the army, consisting of about five hundred men, under Colonel Gilliam, did not reach the Dalles until late in January, when the troops proceeded at once to the seat of war. [Pg 366]

The reports concerning the warlike disposition of the Indians proved to be correct. Already, the Wascopams or Dalles Indians had begun robbing the mission at that place, when Colonel Lee's arrival among them with troops had compelled them to return the stolen property. As the army advanced they found that all the tribes above the Dalles were holding themselves prepared for hostilities. At Well Springs, beyond the Des Chutes River, they were met by a body of about six hundred Indians to whom they gave battle, soon dispersing them, the superior arms and equipments of the whites tending to render timid those tribes yet unaccustomed to so superior an enemy. From thence to Waiilatpu the course of the army was unobstructed.

In the meantime the captives had been given up to the Hudson's Bay Company, and full particulars of the massacre were obtained by the army, with all the subsequent abuses and atrocities suffered by the prisoners. The horrible details were not calculated to soften the first bitterness of hatred which had animated the volunteers on going into the field. Nor was the appearance of an armed force in their midst likely to allay the hostile feelings with which other causes had inspired the Indians. Had not the captives already been removed out of the country, no influence, not even that of the Hudson's Bay Company, could have prevailed to get them out of the power of their captors then. Indeed, in order to treat with the Cayuses in the first place, Mr. Ogden had been obliged to promise peace to the Indians, and now they found instead of peace, every preparation for war. However, as the army took no

immediate action, but only remained in their country to await the appearance of the commissioners appointed by the legislature of Oregon to hold a council with the chiefs of the various tribes, the Cayuses were forced to observe the outward semblance of amity while these councils were pending. [Pg 367]

Arrived at Waiilatpu, the friends and acquaintances of Dr. Whitman were shocked to find that the remains of the victims were still unburied, although a little earth had been thrown over them. Meek, to whom, ever since his meeting with her in the train of the fur-trader, Mrs. Whitman had seemed all that was noble and captivating, had the melancholy satisfaction of bestowing, with others, the last sad rite of burial upon such portions of her once fair person as murder and the wolves had not destroyed. Some tresses of golden hair were severed from the brow so terribly disfigured, to be given to her friends in the Wallamet as a last and only memorial. Among the State documents at Salem, Oregon, may still be seen one of these relics of the Waiilatpu tragedy.

Not only had Meek to discover and inter the remains of Dr. and Mrs. Whitman, but also of his little girl, who was being educated at the mission, with a daughter of his former leader, Bridger.

This sad duty performed, he immediately set out, escorted by a company of one hundred men under Adjutant Wilcox, who accompanied him as far as the foot of the Blue Mountains. Here the companies separated, and Meek went on his way to Washington.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

1848. Meek's party now consisted of himself, Ebbarts, Owens, and four men, who being desirous of returning to the States took this opportunity. However, as the snow proved to be very deep on the Blue Mountains, and the cold severe, two of these four volunteers became discouraged and concluded to remain at Fort Boise, where was a small trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company.

In order to avoid trouble with the Indians he might meet on the western side of the Rocky mountains, Meek had adopted the red belt and Canadian cap of the employees of the Hudson's Bay Company; and to this precaution was owing the fact of his safe passage through the country now all infected with hostility caught from the Cayuses. About three days' travel beyond Fort Boise, the party met a village of Bannack Indians, who at once made warlike demonstrations; but on seeing Meek's costume, and receiving an invitation to hold a 'talk', desisted, and received the travelers in a friendly manner. Meek informed the chief, with all the gravity which had won for him the name of "*shiam shuspusia*" among the Crows in former years, that he was going on the business of the Hudson's Bay Company to Fort Hall; and that Thomas McKay was a day's march behind with a large trading party, and plenty of goods. On the receipt of this good news, the chief ordered his braves to fall back, and permit the party to pass. Yet, fearing the deception might be discovered, they thought it prudent to travel day and night until they reached Fort Hall. [Pg 369]

At this post of the Hudson's Bay Company, in charge of Mr. Grant, they were kindly received, and stopped for a few hours of rest. Mr. Grant being absent, his wife provided liberally for the refreshment of the party, who were glad to find themselves even for a short interval under a roof, beside a fire and partaking of freshly cooked food. But they permitted themselves no unnecessary delay. Before night they were once more on their way, though snow had now commenced to fall afresh, rendering the traveling very difficult. For two days they struggled on, their horses floundering in the soft drifts, until further progress in that manner became impossible. The only alternative left was to abandon their horses and proceed on snow-shoes, which were readily constructed out of willow sticks.

Taking only a blanket and their rifles, and leaving the animals to find their way back to Fort Hall, the little party pushed on. Meek was now on familiar ground, and the old mountain spirit which had once enabled him to endure hunger, cold, and fatigue without murmuring, possessed him now. It was not without a certain sense of enjoyment that he found himself reduced to the necessity of shooting a couple of pole-cats to furnish a supper for himself and party. How long the enjoyment of feeling want would have lasted is uncertain, but probably only long enough to whet the appetite for plenty.

To such a point had the appetites of all the party been whetted, when, after several days of scarcity and toil, followed by nights of emptiness and cold, Meek had the agreeable surprise of falling in with an old mountain comrade on the identical ground of many a former adventure, the head-waters of Bear River. This man, whom Meek was delighted to meet, was Peg-leg Smith, one of the most famous of many well-known mountain-men. He was engaged in herding cattle in the valley of Thomas' Fork, where the tall grass was not quite buried under snow, and had with him a party [Pg 370]

of ten men.

Meek was as cordially received by his former comrade as the unbounded hospitality of mountain manners rendered it certain he would be. A fat cow was immediately sacrificed, which, though not buffalo meat, as in former times it would have been, was very good beef, and furnished a luxurious repast to the pole-cat eaters of the last several days. Smith's camp did not lack the domestic element of women and children, any more than had the trapper's camps in the flush times of the fur-trade. Therefore, seeing that the meeting was most joyful, and full of reminiscences of former winter camps, Smith thought to celebrate the occasion by a grand entertainment. Accordingly, after a great deal of roast beef had been disposed of, a dance was called for, in which white men and Indian women joined with far more mirth and jollity than grace or ceremony. Thus passed some hours of the night, the bearer of dispatches seizing, in true mountain style, the passing moment's pleasure, so long as it did not interfere with the punctilious discharge of his duty. And to the honor of our hero be it said, nothing was ever allowed to interfere with that.

Refreshed and provided with rations for a couple of days, the party started on again next morning, still on snow-shoes, and traveled up Bear River to the head-waters of Green River, crossing from the Muddy fork over to Fort Bridger, where they arrived very much fatigued but quite well in little more than three days' travel. Here again it was Meek's good fortune to meet with his former leader, Bridger, to whom he related what had befallen him since turning pioneer. The meeting was joyful on both sides, [Pg 371] clouded only by the remembrance of what had brought it about, and the reflection that both had a personal wrong to avenge in bringing about the punishment of the Cayuse murderers.

Once more Meek's party were generously fed, and furnished with such provisions as they could carry about their persons. In addition to this, Bridger presented them with four good mules, by which means the travelers were mounted four at a time, while the fifth took exercise on foot; so that by riding or walking, turn about, they were enabled to get on very well as far as the South Pass. Here again for some distance the snow was very deep, and two of their mules were lost in it. Their course lay down the Sweetwater River, past many familiar hunting and camping grounds, to the Platte River. Owing to the deep snows, game was very scarce, and a long day of toil was frequently closed by a supperless sleep under shelter of some rock or bank, with only a blanket for cover. At Red Buttes they were so fortunate as to find and kill a single buffalo, which, separated from the distant herd, was left by Providence in the path of the famished travelers.

On reaching the Platte River they found the traveling improved, as well as the supply of game, and proceeded with less difficulty as far as Fort Laramie, a trading post in charge of a French trader named Papillion. Here again fresh mules were obtained, and the little party treated in the most hospitable manner. In parting from his entertainer, Meek was favored with this brief counsel:

"There is a village of Sioux, of about six hundred lodges, a hundred miles from here. Your course will bring you to it. Look out for yourself, and don't make a Gray muss of it!"—which latter clause referred to the affair of 1837, when the Sioux had killed the [Pg 372] Indian escort of Mr. Gray.

When the party arrived at Ash Hollow, which they meant to have passed in the night, on account of the Sioux village, the snow was again falling so thickly that the party had not perceived their nearness to the village until they were fairly in the midst of it. It was now no safer to retreat than to proceed; and after a moment's consultation, the word was given to keep on. In truth, Meek thought it doubtful whether the Sioux would trouble themselves to come out in such a tempest, and if they did so, that the blinding snow-fall was rather in his favor. Thus reasoning, he was forcing his mule through the drifts as rapidly as the poor worried animal could make its way, when a head was protruded from a lodge door, and "Hallo, Major!" greeted his ear in an accent not altogether English.

On being thus accosted, the party came to a halt, and Meek was invited to enter the lodge, with his friends. His host on this occasion was a French trader named Le Bean, who, after offering the hospitalities of the lodge, and learning who were his guests, offered to accompany the party a few miles on its way. This he did, saying by way of explanation of this act of courtesy, "The Sioux are a bad people; I thought it best to see you safe out of the village." Receiving the thanks of the travelers, he turned back at night-fall, and they continued on all night without stopping to camp, going some distance to the south of their course before turning east again, in order to avoid any possible pursuers.

Without further adventures, and by dint of almost constant travel, the party arrived at St. Joseph, Mo., in safety, in a little over two months, from Portland, Oregon. Soon afterwards, when the circumstances of this journey became known, a steamboat built [Pg 373] for the Missouri River trade was christened the *Joseph L. Meek*, and bore for a motto, on her pilot-house, "The quickest trip yet," in reference both to Meek's overland journey and her own steaming qualities.

As Meek approached the settlements, and knew that he must soon be thrown into society of the highest official grade, and be subjected to such ordeals as he dreaded far more than Indian fighting, or even traveling express across a continent of snow, the subject of how he was to behave in these new and trying positions very frequently occurred to him. He, an uneducated man, trained to mountain life and manners, without money, or even clothes, with nothing to depend on but the importance of his mission and his own mother wit, he felt far more keenly than his careless appearance would suggest, the difficulties and awkwardness of his position.

"I thought a great deal about it," confesses the Col. Joseph L. Meek of to-day, "and I finally concluded that as I had never tried to act like anybody but myself, I would not make myself a fool by beginning to ape other folks now. So I said, 'Joe Meek you always have been, and Joe Meek you shall remain; go ahead, Joe Meek!'"

In fact, it would have been rather difficult putting on fine gentleman airs, in that old worn-out hunting suit of his, and with not a dollar to bless himself. On the contrary, it needed just the devil-may-care temper which naturally belonged to our hero, to carry him through the remainder of his journey to Washington. To be hungry, ill-clad, dirty, and penniless, is sufficient in itself for the subduing of most spirits; how it affected the temper of the messenger from Oregon we shall now learn.

When the weary little party arrived in St. Joseph, they repaired to a hotel, and Meek requested that a meal should be served for all, but frankly confessing that they had [Pg 374] no money to pay. The landlord, however, declined furnishing guests of his style upon such terms, and our travelers were forced to go into camp below the town. Meek now bethought himself of his letters of introduction. It chanced that he had one from two young men among the Oregon volunteers, to their father in St Joseph. Stopping a negro who was passing his camp, he inquired whether such a gentleman was known to him; and on learning that he was, succeeded in inducing the negro to deliver the letter from his sons.

This movement proved successful. In a short space of time the gentleman presented himself, and learning the situation of the party, provided generously for their present wants, and promised any assistance which might be required in future. Meek, however, chose to accept only that which was imperatively needed, namely, something to eat, and transportation to some point on the river where he could take a steamer for St. Louis. A portion of his party chose to remain in St. Joseph, and a portion accompanied him as far as Independence, whither this same St. Joseph gentleman conveyed them in his carriage.

While Meek was stopping at Independence, he was recognized by a sister, whom he had not seen for nineteen years; who, marrying and emigrating from Virginia, had settled on the frontier of Missouri. But he gave himself no time for family reunion and gossip. A steamboat that had been frozen up in the ice all winter, was just about starting for St. Louis, and on board of this he went, with an introduction to the captain, which secured for him every privilege the boat afforded, together with the kindest attention of its officers.

When the steamer arrived in St. Louis, by one of those fortuitous circumstances so common in our hero's career, he was met at the landing by Campbell, a Rocky [Pg 375] Mountain trader who had formerly belonged to the St. Louis Company. This meeting relieved him of any care about his night's entertainment in St. Louis, and it also had another effect—that of relieving him of any further care about the remainder of his journey; for, after hearing Meek's story of the position of affairs in Oregon and his errand to the United States, Campbell had given the same to the newspaper reporters, and Meek, like Byron, waked up next morning to find himself famous.

Having telegraphed to Washington, and received the President's order to come on, the previous evening, our hero wended his way to the levee the morning after his arrival in St. Louis. There were two steamers lying side by side, both up for Pittsburg, with runners for each, striving to outdo each other in securing passengers. [Pg 376] A bright thought occurred to the moneyless envoy—he would earn his passage!

Walking on board one of the boats, which bore the name of *The Declaration*, himself a figure which attracted all eyes by his size and outlandish dress, he mounted to the hurricane deck and began to harrangue the crowd upon the levee, in the voice of a Stentor:

"This way, gentlemen, if you please. Come right on board the *Declaration*. I am the man from Oregon, with dispatches to the President of these United States, that you all read about in this morning's paper. Come on board, ladies and gentlemen, if you want to hear the news from Oregon. I've just come across the plains, two months from the Columbia River, where the Injuns are killing your missionaries. Those passengers who come aboard the *Declaration* shall hear all about it before they get to Pittsburg. Don't stop thar, looking at my old wolf-skin cap, but just come aboard, and hear what I've got to tell!"

The novelty of this sort of solicitation operated capitally. Many persons crowded on board the *Declaration* only to get a closer look at this picturesque personage who invited them, and many more because they were really interested to know the news from the far off young territory which had fallen into trouble. So it chanced that the *Declaration* was inconveniently crowded on this particular morning.

After the boat had got under way, the captain approached his roughest looking cabin passenger and inquired in a low tone of voice if he were really and truly the messenger from Oregon.

"Thar's what I've got to show for it;" answered Meek, producing his papers. [Pg 377]

"Well, all I have to say is, Mr. Meek, that you are the best runner this boat ever had; and you are welcome to your passage ticket, and anything you desire besides."

Finding that his bright thought had succeeded so well, Meek's spirit rose with the occasion, and the passengers had no reason to complain that he had not kept his word. Before he reached Wheeling his popularity was immense, notwithstanding the condition of his wardrobe. At Cincinnati he had time to present a letter to the celebrated Doctor ——, who gave him another, which proved to be an 'open sesame' wherever he went thereafter.

On the morning of his arrival in Wheeling it happened that the stage which then carried passengers to Cumberland, where they took the train for Washington, had already departed. Elated by his previous good fortune our ragged hero resolved not to be delayed by so trivial a circumstance; but walking pompously into the stage office inquired, with an air which must have smacked strongly of the mock-heroic, if he "could have a stage for Cumberland?"

The nicely dressed, dignified elderly gentleman who managed the business of the office, regarded the man who proffered this modest request for a moment in motionless silence, then slowly raising the spectacles over his eyes to a position on his forehead, finished his survey with unassisted vision. Somewhat impressed by the manner in which Meek bore this scrutiny, he ended by demanding "who are you?"

Tickled by the absurdity of the tableau they were enacting, Meek straightened himself up to his six feet two, and replied with an air of superb self assurance—

"I am Envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary from the Republic of Oregon to the Court of the United States!" [Pg 378]

After a pause in which the old gentleman seemed to be recovering from some great surprise, he requested to see the credentials of this extraordinary envoy. Still more surprised he seemed on discovering for himself that the personage before him was really a messenger from Oregon to the government of the United States. But the effect was magical. In a moment the bell-rope was pulled, and in an incredibly short space of time a coach stood at the door ready to convey the waiting messenger on his way to Washington.

In the meantime in a conversation with the stage agent, Meek had explained more fully the circumstances of his mission, and the agent had become much interested. On parting, Meek received a ticket to the Relay House, with many expressions of regret from the agent that he could ticket him no farther.

"But it is all the same," said he; "you are sure to go through."

"Or run a train off the track," rejoined Meek, as he was bowed out of the office.

It happened that there were some other passengers waiting to take the first stage,

and they crowded into this one, glad of the unexpected opportunity, but wondering at the queer looking passenger to whom the agent was so polite. This scarcely concealed curiosity was all that was needed to stimulate the mad-cap spirits of our so far "conquering hero." Putting his head out of the window just at the moment of starting, he electrified everybody, horses included, by the utterance of a war-whoop and yell that would have done credit to a wild Camanche. Satisfied with the speed to which this demoniac noise had excited the driver's prancing steeds, he quietly ensconced himself in his corner of the coach and waited for his fellow passengers to recover from their stunned sensations. When their complete recovery had been [Pg 379] effected, there followed the usual questioning and explanations, which ended in the inevitable lionizing that was so much to the taste of this sensational individual.

On the cars at Cumberland, and at the eating-houses, the messenger from Oregon kept up his sensational character, indulging in alternate fits of mountain manners, and again assuming a disproportionate amount of grandeur; but in either view proving himself very amusing. By the time the train reached the Relay House, many of the passengers had become acquainted with Meek, and were prepared to understand and enjoy each new phase of his many-sided comicality.

The ticket with which the stage agent presented him, dead-headed him only to this point. Here again he must make his poverty a jest, and joke himself through to Washington. Accordingly when the conductor came through the car in which he, with several of his new acquaintances were sitting, demanding tickets, he was obliged to tap his blanketed passenger on the shoulder to attract his attention to the "ticket, sir!"

"*Ha ko any me ca, hanch?*" said Meek, starting up and addressing him in the Snake tongue.

"Ticket, sir!" repeated the conductor, staring.

"*Ka hum pa, hanch?*" returned Meek, assuming a look which indicated that English was as puzzling to him, as Snake to other people.

Finding that his time would be wasted on this singular passenger, the conductor went on through the train; returning after a time with a fresh demand for his ticket. But Meek sustained his character admirably, and it was only through the excessive amusement of the passengers that the conductor suspected that he was being made the subject of a practical joke. At this stage of affairs it was privately explained to [Pg 380] him who and what his waggish customer was, and tickets were no more mentioned during the journey.

On the arrival of the train at Washington, the heart of our hero became for a brief moment of time "very little." He felt that the importance of his mission demanded some dignity of appearance—some conformity to established rules and precedents. But of the latter he knew absolutely nothing; and concerning the former, he realized the absurdity of a dignitary clothed in blankets and a wolf-skin cap. 'Joe Meek I must remain,' said he to himself, as he stepped out of the train, and glanced along the platform at the crowd of porters with the names of their hotels on their hat-bands. Learning from inquiry that Coleman's was the most fashionable place, he decided that to Coleman's he would go, judging correctly that it was best to show no littleness of heart even in the matter of hotels.

CHAPTER XXXV.

1848. When Meek arrived at Coleman's it was the dinner hour, and following the crowd to the dining saloon, he took the first seat he came to, not without being very much stared at. He had taken his cue and the staring was not unexpected, consequently not so embarrassing as it might otherwise have been. A bill of fare was laid beside his plate. Turning to the colored waiter who placed it there, he startled him first by inquiring in a low growling voice—

"What's that boy?"

"Bill of fare, sah," replied the "boy," who recognized the Southerner in the use of that one word.

"Read!" growled Meek again. "The people in *my* country can't read."

Though taken by surprise, the waiter, politely obedient, proceeded to enumerate the courses on the bill of fare. When he came to game——

"Stop thar, boy!" commanded Meek, "what kind of game?"

"Small game, sah."

"Fetch me a piece of antelope," leaning back in his chair with a look of satisfaction on

his face.

"Got none of that sah; don't know what that ar' sah."

"Don't know!" with a look of pretended surprise. "In *my* country antelope and deer ar' small game; bear and buffalo ar' large game. I reckon if you haven't got one, you haven't got the other, either. In that case you may fetch me some beef." [Pg 382]

The waiter disappeared grinning, and soon returned with the customary thin and small cut, which Meek eyed at first contemptuously, and then accepting it in the light of a sample swallowed it at two mouthfuls, returning his plate to the waiter with an approving smile, and saying loud enough to be overheard by a score of people——

"Boy, that will do. Fetch me about four pounds of the same kind."

By this time the blanketed beef-eater was the recipient of general attention, and the "boy" who served him comprehending with that quickness which distinguishes servants, that he had no ordinary backwoodsman to deal with, was all the time on the alert to make himself useful. People stared, then smiled, then asked each other "who is it?" loud enough for the stranger to hear. Meek looked neither to the right nor to the left, pretending not to hear the whispering. When he had finished his beef, he again addressed himself to the attentive "boy."

"That's better meat than the old mule I eat in the mountains."

Upon this remark the whispering became more general, and louder, and smiles more frequent.

"What have you got to drink, boy?" continued Meek, still unconscious. "Isn't there a sort of wine called—some kind of *pain*?"

"Champagne, sah?"

"That's the stuff, I reckon; bring me some."

While Meek drank his champagne, with an occasional aside to his faithful attendant, people laughed and wondered "who the devil it was." At length, having finished his wine, and overhearing many open inquiries as to his identity, the hero of many bear-fights slowly arose, and addressing the company through the before-mentioned "boy," said: [Pg 383]

"You want to know who I am?"

"If you please, sah; yes, if you please, sah, for the sake of these gentlemen present," replied the "boy," answering for the company.

"Wall then," proclaimed Meek with a grandiloquent air quite at variance with his blanket coat and unkempt hair, yet which displayed his fine person to advantage, "I am Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary from the Republic of Oregon to the Court of the United States!"

With that he turned and strode from the room. He had not proceeded far, however, before he was overtaken by a party of gentlemen in pursuit. Senator Underwood of Kentucky immediately introduced himself, calling the envoy by name, for the dispatch from St. Louis had prepared the President and the Senate for Meek's appearance in Washington, though it had not advised them of his style of dress and address. Other gentlemen were introduced, and questions followed questions in rapid succession.

When curiosity was somewhat abated, Meek expressed a wish to see the President without delay. To Underwood's question as to whether he did not wish to make his toilet before visiting the White House, his reply was, "business first, and toilet afterwards."

"But," said Underwood, "even your business can wait long enough for that."

"No, that's your mistake, Senator, and I'll tell you why: I can't dress, for two reasons, both good ones. I've not got a cent of money, nor a second suit of clothes."

The generous Kentuckian offered to remove the first of the objections on the spot, but Meek declined. "I'll see the President first, and hear what he has to say about my mission." Then calling a coach from the stand, he sprang into it, answering the driver's question of where he would be taken, with another inquiry. [Pg 384]

"Whar should a man of *my* style want to go?—to the White House, of course!" and so was driven away amid the general laughter of the gentlemen in the portico at Coleman's, who had rather doubted his intention to pay his respects to the President in his dirty blankets.

He was admitted to the Presidential mansion by a mulatto of about his own age, with whom he remembered playing when a lad, for it must be remembered that the Meeks and Polks were related, and this servant had grown up in the family. On inquiring if

he could see the President, he was directed to the office of the private Secretary, Knox Walker, also a relative of Meek's on the mother's side.

On entering he found the room filled with gentlemen waiting to see the President, each when his turn to be admitted should arrive. The Secretary sat reading a paper, over the top of which he glanced but once at the new comer, to ask him to be seated. But Meek was not in the humor for sitting. He had not traveled express for more than two months, in storm and cold, on foot and on horseback, by day and by night, with or without food, as it chanced, to sit down quietly now and wait. So he took a few turns up and down the room, and seeing that the Secretary glanced at him a little curiously, stopped and said:

"I should like to see the President immediately. Just tell him if you please that there is a gentleman from Oregon waiting to see him on very important business." [Pg 385]

At the word *Oregon*, the Secretary sprang up, dashed his paper to the ground, and crying out "Uncle Joe!" came forward with both hands extended to greet his long lost relative.

"Take care, Knox! don't come too close," said Meek stepping back, "I'm ragged, dirty, and—lousy."

"TAKE CARE, KNOX."

But Walker seized his cousin's hand, without seeming fear of the consequences, and for a few moments there was an animated exchange of questions and answers, which Meek at last interrupted to repeat his request to be admitted to the President without delay. Several times the Secretary turned to leave the room, but as often came back with some fresh inquiry, until Meek fairly refused to say another word, until he had delivered his dispatches.

When once the Secretary got away he soon returned with a request from the President for the appearance of the Oregon messenger, all other visitors being dismissed for that day. Polk's reception proved as cordial as Walker's had been. He [Pg 386] seized the hand of his newly found relative, and welcomed him in his own name, as well as that of messenger from the distant, much loved, and long neglected Oregon. The interview lasted for a couple of hours. Oregon affairs and family affairs were talked over together; the President promising to do all for Oregon that he could do; at the same time he bade Meek make himself at home in the Presidential mansion, with true southern hospitality.

But Meek, although he had carried off his poverty and all his deficiencies in so brave a style hitherto, felt his assurance leaving him, when, his errand performed, he stood in the presence of rank and elegance, a mere mountain-man in ragged blankets, whose only wealth consisted of an order for five hundred dollars on the Methodist mission in New York, unavailable for present emergencies. And so he declined the hospitalities of the White House, saying he "could make himself at home in an Indian wigwam in Oregon, or among the Rocky Mountains, but in the residence of the chief magistrate of a great nation, he felt out of place, and ill at ease."

Polk, however, would listen to no refusal, and still further abashed his Oregon cousin by sending for Mrs. Polk and Mrs. Walker, to make his acquaintance. Says Meek:

"When I heard the silks rustling in the passage, I felt more frightened than if a hundred Blackfeet had whooped in my ear. A mist came over my eyes, and when Mrs. Polk spoke to me I couldn't think of anything to say in return."

But the ladies were so kind and courteous that he soon began to see a little, though not quite plainly while their visit lasted. Before the interview with the President and his family was ended, the poverty of the Oregon envoy became known, which led to the immediate supplying of all his wants. Major Polk was called in and introduced; [Pg 387] and to him was deputed the business of seeing Meek "got up" in a style creditable to

himself and his relations. Meek avers that when he had gone through the hands of the barber and tailor, and surveyed himself in a full length mirror, he was at first rather embarrassed, being under the impression that he was being introduced to a fashionable and decidedly good-looking gentleman, before whose overpowering style he was disposed to shrink, with the old familiar feeling of being in blankets.

But Meek was not the sort of man to be long in getting used to a situation however novel or difficult. In a very short time he was *au fait* in the customs of the capital. His perfect frankness led people to laugh at his errors as eccentricities; his good looks and natural *bonhomie* procured him plenty of admirers; while his position at the White House caused him to be envied and lionized at once.

On the day following his arrival the President sent in a message to Congress accompanied by the memorial from the Oregon legislature and other documents appertaining to the Oregon cause. Meek was introduced to Benton, Oregon's indefatigable friend, and received from him the kindest treatment; also to Dallas, President of the Senate; Douglas, Fremont, Gen. Houston, and all the men who had identified themselves with the interests of the West.

It should be stated that only a short time previous to the Waiilatpu massacre a delegate had left Oregon for Washington, by ship around Cape Horn, who had been accredited by the governor of the colony only, and that the legislature had subsequently passed resolutions expressive of their disapproval of "secret factions," by which was meant the mission party, whose delegate Mr. Thornton was. [Pg 388]

It so happened that, by reason of the commander of the *Portsmouth* having assumed it to be a duty to convey Mr. Thornton from La Paz, where through the infidelity of the Captain of the *Whitton*, he was stranded, he was enabled to reach the States early in the Spring, arriving in fact a week or two before Meek reached Washington. Thus Oregon had two representatives, although not entitled to any: nor had either a right to a seat in either House; yet to one this courtesy was granted, while the two together controlled more powerful influences than were ever before or since brought to bear on the fate of any single territory of the United States. While Mr. Thornton sat among Senators as a sort of consulting member or referee, but without a vote; Meek had the private ear of the President, and mingled freely among members of both Houses, in a social character, thereby exercising a more immediate influence than his more learned coadjutor.

In the meantime our hero was making the most of his advantages. He went to dinners and champagne suppers, besides giving an occasional one of the latter. At the presidential levees he made himself agreeable to witty and distinguished ladies, answering innumerable questions about Oregon and Indians, generally with a veil of reserve between himself and the questioner whenever the inquiries became, as they sometimes would, disagreeably searching. Again the spirit of perversity and mischief led him to make his answers so very direct as to startle or bewilder the questioner.

On one occasion a lady with whom he was promenading a drawing-room at some Senator's reception, admiring his handsome physique perhaps, and wondering if any woman owned it, finally ventured the question—was he married?

"Yes, indeed," answered Meek, with emphasis, "I have a wife and several children." [Pg 389]

"Oh dear," exclaimed the lady, "I should think your wife would be *so* afraid of the Indians!"

"Afraid of the Indians!" exclaimed Meek in his turn; "why, madam, she is an Indian herself!"

No further remarks on the subject were ventured that evening; and it is doubtful if the lady did not take his answer as a rebuke to her curiosity rather than the plain truth that it was.

Meek found his old comrade, Kit Carson, in Washington, staying with Fremont at the house of Senator Benton. Kit, who had left the mountains as poor as any other of the mountain-men, had no resource at that time except the pay furnished by Fremont for his services as guide and explorer in the California and Oregon expeditions; where, in fact, it was Carson and not Fremont who deserved fame as a path-finder. However that may be, Carson had as little money as men of his class usually have, and needed it as much. So long as Meek's purse was supplied, as it generally was, by some member of the family at the White House, Carson could borrow from him. But one being quite as careless of money as the other, they were sometimes both out of pocket at the same time. In that case the conversation was apt to take a turn like this:

Carson. Meek, let me have some money, can't you?

Meek. I haven't got any money, Kit.

Carson. Go and get some.

Meek. —— it, whar am I to get money from?

Carson. Try the "contingent fund," can't you?

Truth to tell the contingent fund was made to pay for a good many things not properly chargeable to the necessary expenditures of "Envoy Extraordinary" like our friend from Oregon.

The favoritism with which our hero was everywhere received was something remarkable, even when all the circumstances of his relationship to the chief magistrate, and the popularity of the Oregon question were considered. Doubtless the novelty of having a bear-fighting and Indian-fighting Rocky Mountain man to lionize, was one great secret of the furore which greeted him wherever he went; but even that fails to account fully for the enthusiasm he awakened, since mountain-men had begun to be pretty well known and understood, from the journal of Fremont and other explorers. It could only have been the social genius of the man which enabled him to overcome the impediments of lack of education, and the associations of half a lifetime. But whatever was the fortunate cause of his success, he enjoyed it to the full. He took excursions about the country in all directions, petted and spoiled like any "curled darling" instead of the six-foot-two Rocky Mountain trapper that he was. [Pg 390]

In June he received an invitation to Baltimore, tendered by the city council, and was received by that body with the mayor at its head, in whose carriage he was conveyed to Monument Square, to be welcomed by a thousand ladies, smiling and showering roses upon him as he passed. And kissing the roses because he could not kiss the ladies, he bowed and smiled himself past the festive groups waiting to receive the messenger from Oregon. Music, dining, and the parade usual to such occasions distinguished this day, which Meek declares to have been the proudest of his life; not denying that the beauty of the Baltimore ladies contributed chiefly to produce that impression.

On the fourth of July, Polk laid the corner stone of the National Monument. The occasion was celebrated with great *eclat*, the address being delivered by Winthrop, the military display, and the fire-works in the evening being unusually fine. In the procession General Scott and staff rode on one side of the President's carriage, Col. May and Meek on the other,—Meek making a great display of horsemanship, in which as a mountain-man he excelled. [Pg 391]

A MOUNTAIN-MAN IN CLOVER.

A little later in the summer Meek joined a party of Congressmen who were making campaign speeches in the principal cities of the north. At Lowell, Mass., he visited the cotton factories, and was equally surprised at the extent of the works, and the number of young women employed in them. Seeing this, the forewoman requested him to stop until noon and see the girls come out. As they passed in review before him, she asked if he had made his choice.

"No," replied the gallant Oregonian, "it would be impossible to choose, out of such a lot as that; I should have to take them all."

If our hero, under all his gaity smothered a sigh of regret that he was not at liberty to take *one*—a woman like those with whom for the first time in his life he was privileged to associate—who shall blame him? The kind of life he was living now was something totally different to anything in the past. It opened to his comprehension delightful possibilities of what might have been done and enjoyed under other circumstances, yet which now never could be done or enjoyed, until sometimes he was ready to fly from all these allurements, and hide himself again in the Rocky Mountains. Then again by a desperate effort, such thoughts were banished, and he rushed more eagerly than before into every pleasure afforded by the present moment, as if to make the present atone for the past and the future.

The kindness of the ladies at the White House, while it was something to be grateful for, as well as to make him envied, often had the effect to disturb his tranquility by the suggestions it gave rise to. Yet he was always demanding it, always accepting it. [Pg 392] So constantly was he the attendant of his lady cousins in public and in private, riding and driving, or sauntering in the gardens of the presidential mansion, that the less favored among their acquaintances felt called upon to believe themselves aggrieved. Often, as the tall form of our hero was seen with a lady on either arm promenading the gardens at evening, the question would pass among the curious but uninitiated —"Who is that?" And the reply of some jealous grumbler would be—"It is that —— Rocky Mountain man," so loud sometimes as to be overheard by the careless trio, who smothered a laugh behind a hat or a fan.

And so passed that brief summer of our hero's life. A great deal of experience, of sight-seeing, and enjoyment had been crowded into a short few months of time. He had been introduced to and taken by the hand by the most celebrated men of the day. Nor had he failed to meet with men whom he had known in the mountains and in Oregon. His old employer, Wilkes, who was ill in Washington, sent for him to come and tell "some of those Oregon lies" for his amusement, and Meek, to humor him, stretched some of his good stories to the most wonderful dimensions.

But from the very nature of the enjoyment it could not last long; it was too vivid and sensational for constant wear. Feeling this, he began to weary of Washington, and more particularly since he had for the last few weeks been stopping away from the White House. In one of his restless moods he paid a visit to Polk, who detecting the state of his mind asked laughingly——

"Well, Meek, what do you want now?"

"I want to be franked."

"How long will five hundred dollars last you?" [Pg 393]

"About as many days as there ar' hundreds, I reckon."

"You are shockingly extravagant, Meek. Where do you think all this money is to come from?"

"It is not my business to know, Mr. President," replied Meek, laughing, "but it *is* the business of these United States to pay the expenses of the messenger from Oregon, isn't it?"

"I think I will send you to the Secretary of War to be franked, Meek; his frank is better than mine. But no, stay; I will speak to Knox about it this time. And you must not spend your money so recklessly, Meek; it will not do—it will not do."

Meek thanked the President both for the money and the advice, but gave a champagne supper the next night, and in a week's time was as empty-handed as ever.

The close of the session was at hand and nothing had been done except to talk. Congress was to adjourn at noon on Monday, August 14th, and it was now Saturday the 12th. The friends of Oregon were anxious; the two waiting Oregonians nearly desperate. On this morning of the 12th, the friends of the bill, under Benton's lead, determined upon obtaining a vote on the final passage of the bill; resolving that they would not yield to the usual motions for delay and adjournments, but that they would, if necessary, sit until twelve o'clock Monday.

Saturday night wore away; the Sabbath morning's sun arose; and at last, two hours after sunrise, a consultation was held between Butler, Mason, Calhoun, Davis, and Foote, which resulted in the announcement that no further opposition would be offered to taking the vote upon the final passage of the Oregon bill. The vote was then taken, the bill passed, and the weary Senate adjourned, to meet again on Monday for a final adjournment.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

1848-9. The long suspense ended, Meek prepared to return to Oregon, if not without some regrets, at the same time not unwillingly. His restless temper, and life-long habits of unrestrained freedom began to revolt against the conventionality of his position in Washington. Besides, in appointing officers for the new territory, Polk had made him United States Marshal, than which no office could have suited him better, and he was as prompt to assume the discharge of its duties, as all his life he had been to undertake any duty to which his fortunes assigned him.

On the 20th of August, only six days after the passage of the territorial bill, he received his papers from Buchanan, and set off for Bedford Springs, whither the family from the White House were flown to escape from the suffocating air of

Washington in August. He had brought his papers to be signed by Polk, and being expected by the President found everything arranged for his speedy departure; Polk even ordering a seat for him in the upcoming coach, by telegraph. On learning this from the President, at dinner, when the band was playing, Meek turned to the leader and ordered him to play "Sweet Home," much to the amusement of his lady cousins, who had their own views of the sweets of a home in Oregon. A hurried farewell, spoken to each of his friends separately, and Oregon's new Marshal was ready to proceed on his long journey toward the Pacific. [Pg 395]

The occasion of Polk's haste in the matter of getting Meek started, was his anxiety to have the Oregon government become a fact before the expiration of his term of office. The appointment of Governor of the new territory had been offered to Shields, and declined. Another commission had been made out, appointing General Joseph Lane of Indiana, Governor of Oregon, and the commission was that day signed by the President and given to Meek to be delivered to Lane in the shortest possible time. His last words to the Marshal on parting were—"God bless you, Meek. Tell Lane to have a territorial government organized during my administration."

Of the ten thousand dollars appropriated by Congress "to be expended under the direction of the President, in payment for services and expenses of such persons as had been engaged by the provisional government of Oregon in conveying communications to and from the United States; and for purchase of presents for such Indian tribes as the peace and quiet of the country required"—Thornton received two thousand six hundred dollars, Meek seven thousand four hundred, and the Indian tribes none. Whether the President believed that the peace and quiet of the country did not require presents to be made to the Indians, or whether family credit required that Meek should get the lion's share, is not known. However that may be, our hero felt himself to be quite rich, and proceeded to get rid of his superfluity, as will hereafter be seen, with his customary prodigality and enjoyment of the present without regard to the future.

Before midnight on the day of his arrival at the springs, Meek was on his way to Indiana to see General Lane. Arriving at the Newburg landing one morning at day-break, he took horse immediately for the General's residence at Newburg, and presented him with his commission soon after breakfast. Lane sat writing, when [Pg 396] Meek, introducing himself, laid his papers before him.

"Do you accept?" asked Meek.

"Yes," answered Lane.

"How soon can you be ready to start?"

"In fifteen minutes!" answered Lane, with military promptness.

Three days, however, were actually required to make the necessary preparations for leaving his farm and proceeding to the most remote corner of the United States territory.

At St. Louis they were detained one day, waiting for a boat to Leavenworth, where they expected to meet their escort. This one day was too precious to be lost in waiting by so business-like a person as our hero, who, when nothing more important was to be done generally was found trying to get rid of his money. So, on this occasion, after having disburdened himself of a small amount in treating the new Governor and all his acquaintances, he entered into negotiations with a peddler who was importuning the passengers to buy everything, from a jack-knife to a silk dress.

Finding that Nat. Lane, the General's son, wanted a knife, but was disposed to beat down the price, Meek made an offer for the lot of a dozen or two, and thereby prevented Lane getting one at any price. Not satisfied with this investment, he next made a purchase of three whole pieces of silk, at one dollar and fifty cents per yard. At this stage of the transaction General Lane interfered sufficiently to inquire "what he expected to do with that stuff?"

"Can't tell," answered Meek; "but I reckon it is worth the money."

"Better save your money," said the more prudent Lane. But the incorrigible [Pg 397] spendthrift only laughed, and threatened to buy out the Jew's entire stock, if Lane persisted in preaching economy.

At St. Louis, besides his son Nat., Lane was met by Lieut. Hawkins, who was appointed to the command of the escort of twenty-five riflemen, and Dr. Hayden, surgeon of the company. This party proceeded to Leavenworth, the point of starting, where the wagons and men of Hawkins' command awaited them. At this place, Meek was met by a brother and two sisters who had come to look on him for the first time in many years. The two days' delay which was necessary to get the train ready for a start, afforded an opportunity for this family reunion, the last that might ever occur between its widely separated branches, new shoots from which extend at this day from Virginia to Alabama, and from Tennessee to California and Oregon.

By the 10th of September the new government was on its way to Oregon in the persons of Lane and Meek. The whole company of officers, men, and teamsters, numbered about fifty-five; the wagons ten; and riding-horses, an extra supply for each rider.

The route taken, with the object to avoid the snows of a northern winter, was from Leavenworth to Santa Fe, and thence down the Rio Grande to near El Paso; thence northwesterly by Tucson, in Arizona; thence to the Pimas village on the Gila River; following the Gila to its junction with the Colorado, thence northwesterly again to the Bay of San Pedro in California. From this place the company were to proceed by ship to San Francisco; and thence again by ship to the Columbia River.

On the Santa Fe trail they met the army returning from Mexico, under Price, and learned from them that they could not proceed with wagons beyond Santa Fe. The [Pg 398] lateness of the season, although it was not attended with snow, as on the northern route it would have been, subjected the travelers nevertheless to the strong, cold winds which blow over the vast extent of open country between the Missouri River and the high mountain range which forms the water-shed of the continent. It also made it more difficult to subsist the animals, especially after meeting Price's army, which had already swept the country bare.

On coming near Santa Fe, Meek was riding ahead of his party, when he had a most unexpected encounter. Seeing a covered traveling carriage drawn up under the shade of some trees growing beside a small stream, not far off from the trail, he resolved, with his usual love of adventure, to discover for himself the character of the proprietor. But as he drew nearer, he discovered no one, although a camp-table stood under the trees, spread with refreshments, not only of a solid, but a fluid nature. The sight of a bottle of cognac induced him to dismount, and he was helping himself to a liberal glass, when a head was protruded from a covering of blankets inside the carriage, and a heavy bass voice was heard in a polite protest:

"Seems to me, stranger, you are making free with my property!"

"Here's to you, sir," rejoined the purloiner; "it isn't often I find as good brandy as that,"—holding out the glass admiringly,—"but when I do, I make it a point of honor not to pass it."

"May I inquire your name, sir?" asked the owner of the brandy, forced to smile at the good-humored audacity of his guest.

"I couldn't refuse to give my name after that,"—replacing the glass on the table, —"and I now introduce myself as Joseph L. Meek, Esq., Marshal of Oregon, on my [Pg 399] way from Washington to assist General Lane in establishing a territorial Government west of the Rocky Mountains."

"Meek!—what, not the Joe Meek I have heard my brothers tell so much about?"

"Joe Meek is my name; but whar did your brothers know me?" inquired our hero, mystified in his turn.

"I think you must have known Captain William Sublette and his brother Milton, ten or twelve years ago, in the Rocky Mountains," said the gentleman, getting out of the carriage, and approaching Meek with extended hand.

A delighted recognition now took place. From Solomon Sublette, the owner of the carriage and the cognac, Meek learned many particulars of the life and death of his former leaders in the mountains. Neither of them were then living; but this younger brother, Solomon, had inherited Captain Sublette's wife and wealth at the same time. After these explanations, Mr. Sublette raised the curtains of the carriage again, and assisted to descend from it a lady, whom he introduced as his wife, and who exhibited much gratification in becoming acquainted with the hero of many a tale recited to her by her former husband, Captain Sublette.

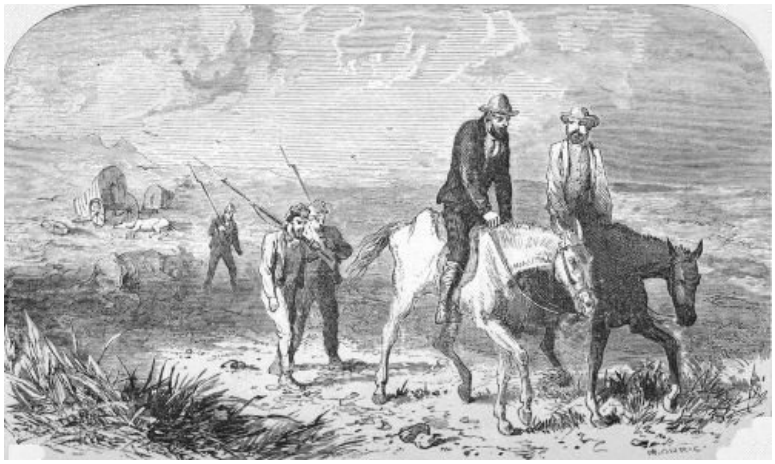
In the midst of this pleasant exchange of reminiscences, the remainder of Meek's party rode up, were introduced, and invited to regale themselves on the fine liquors with which Mr. Sublette's carriage proved to be well furnished. This little adventure gave our hero much pleasure, as furnishing a link between the past and present, and bringing freshly to mind many incidents already beginning to fade in his memory.

At Santa Fe, the train stopped to be overhauled and reconstructed. The wagons having to be abandoned, their contents had to be packed on mules, after the manner [Pg 400] of mountain or of Mexican travel and transportation. This change accomplished, with as little delay as possible, the train proceeded without any other than the usual difficulties, as far as Tucson, when two of the twenty-five riflemen deserted, having become suddenly enamored of liberty, in the dry and dusty region of southern Arizona.

Lieutenant Hawkins, immediately on discovering the desertion, dispatched two men, well armed, to compel their return. One of the men detailed for this duty belonged to the riflemen, but the other was an American, who, with a company of Mexican

packers, had joined the train at Santa Fe, and was acting in the capacity of pilot. In order to fit out this volunteer for the service, always dangerous, of retaking deserting soldiers, Meek had lent him his Colt's revolvers. It was a vain precaution, however, both the men being killed in attempting to capture the deserters; and Meek's pistols were never more heard of, having fallen into the murderous hands of the runaways.

Drouth now began to be the serious evil with which the travelers had to contend. From the Pimas villages westward, it continually grew worse, the animals being greatly reduced from the want both of food and water. At the crossing of the Colorado, the animals had to be crossed over by swimming, the officers and men by rafts made of bulrushes. Lane and Meek being the first to be ferried over, were landed unexpectedly in the midst of a Yuma village. The Indians, however, gave them no trouble, and, except the little artifice of drowning some of the mules at the crossing, in order to get their flesh to eat, committed neither murders nor thefts, nor any outrage whatever.



GOVERNOR LANE AND MARSHAL MEEK ENROUTE TO OREGON.

It was quite as well for the unlucky mules to be drowned and eaten as it was for their [Pg 401]
fellows to travel on over the arid desert before them until they starved and perished, which they nearly all did. From the Colorado on, the company of Lieut. Hawkins became thoroughly demoralized. Not only would the animals persist in dying, several in a day, but the soldiers also persisted in deserting, until, by the time he reached the coast, his forlorn hope was reduced to three men. But it was not the drouth in their case which caused the desertions: it was rumors which they heard everywhere along the route, of mines of gold and silver, where they flattered themselves they could draw better pay than from Uncle Sam's coffers.

The same difficulty from desertion harassed Lieutenant-Colonel Loring in the following summer, when he attempted to establish a line of posts along the route to Oregon, by the way of Forts Kearney, Laramie, and through the South Pass to Fort Hall. His mounted rifle regiment dwindled down to almost nothing. At one time, over one hundred men deserted in a body: and although he pursued and captured seventy of them, he could not keep them from deserting again at the first favorable moment. The bones of many of those gold-seeking soldiers were left on the plains, where wolves had stripped the flesh from them; and many more finally had rude burial at the hands of fellow gold-seekers: but few indeed ever won or enjoyed that for which they risked everything.

On arriving at Cook's wells, some distance beyond the Colorado, our travelers found that the water at this place was tainted by the body of a mule which had lost its life some days before in endeavoring to get at the water. This was a painful discovery for the thirsty party to make. However, there being no water for some distance ahead, [Pg 402]
General Lane boiled some of it, and made coffee of it, remarking that "maggots were more easily swallowed cooked than raw!"

And here the writer, and no doubt, the reader too, is compelled to make a reflection. Was the office of Governor of a Territory at fifteen hundred dollars a year, and Indian agent at fifteen hundred more, worth a journey of over three thousand miles, chiefly by land, even allowing that there had been no maggots in the water? *Quien sábe?*

Not far from this locality our party came upon one hundred wagons abandoned by Major Graham, who had not been able to cross the desert with them. Proceeding onward, the riders eventually found themselves on foot, there being only a few animals left alive to transport the baggage that could not be abandoned. So great was their extremity, that to quench their thirst the stomach of a mule was opened to get at the moisture it contained. In the horror and pain of the thirst-fever, Meek renewed again the sufferings he had undergone years before in the deserts inhabited by Diggers, and on the parched plains of the Snake River.

About the middle of January the Oregon Government, which had started out so gaily from Fort Leavenworth, arrived weary, dusty, foot-sore, famished, and suffering, at William's Ranch on the Santa Anna River, which empties into the Bay of San Pedro. Here they were very kindly received, and their wants ministered to.

At this place Meek developed, in addition to his various accomplishments, a talent for speculation. While overhauling his baggage, the knives and the silk which had been purchased of the *peddler* in St. Louis, were brought to light. No sooner did the senoritas catch a glimpse of the shining fabrics than they went into raptures over them, after the fashion of their sex. Seeing the state of mind to which these raptures, [Pg 403] if unheeded, were likely to reduce the ladies of his house, Mr. Williams approached Meek delicately on the subject of purchase. But Meek, in the first flush of speculative shrewdness declared that as he had bought the goods for his own wife, he could not find it in his heart to sell them.

However, as the senoritas were likely to prove inconsolable, Mr. Williams again mentioned the desire of his family to be clad in silk, and the great difficulty, nay, impossibility, of obtaining the much coveted fabric in that part of the world, and accompanied his remarks with an offer of ten dollars a yard for the lot. At this magnificent offer our hero affected to be overcome by regard for the feelings of the senoritas, and consented to sell his dollar and a-half silks for ten dollars per yard.

In the same manner, finding that knives were a desirable article in that country, very much wanted by miners and others, he sold out his dozen or two, for an ounce each of gold-dust, netting altogether the convenient little profit of about five hundred dollars. When Gen. Lane was informed of the transaction, and reminded of his objections to the original purchase, he laughed heartily.

"Well, Meek," said he, "you were drunk when you bought them, and by —— I think you must have been drunk when you sold them; but drunk or sober, I will own you can beat me at a bargain."

Such bargains, however, became common enough about this time in California, for this was the year memorable in California history, of the breaking out of the gold-fever, and the great rush to the mines which made even the commonest things worth their weight in gold-dust.

Proceeding to Los Angelos, our party, once more comfortably mounted, found traveling comparatively easy. At this place they found quartered the command of Maj. Graham, whose abandoned wagons had been passed at the *Hornella* on the [Pg 404] Colorado River. The town, too, was crowded with miners, men of every class, but chiefly American adventurers, drawn together from every quarter of California and Mexico by the rumor of the gold discovery at Sutter's Fort.

On arriving at San Pedro, a vessel—the *Southampton*, was found ready to sail. She had on board a crowd of fugitives from Mexico, bound to San Francisco, where they hoped to find repose from the troubles which harassed that revolutionary Republic.

At San Francisco, Meek was surprised to meet about two hundred Oregonians, who on the first news of the gold discovery the previous autumn, had fled, as it is said men shall flee on the day of judgment—leaving the wheat ungathered in the fields, the grain unground in the mills, the cattle unherded on the plains, their tools and farming implements rusting on the ground—everything abandoned as if it would never more be needed, to go and seek the shining dust, which is vainly denominated "filthy lucre." The two hundred were on their way home, having all either made something, or lost their health by exposure so that they were obliged to return. But they left many more in the mines.

Such were the tales told in San Francisco of the wonderful fortunes of some of the miners that young Lane became infected with the universal fever and declared his intention to try mining with the rest. Meek too, determined to risk something in gold-seeking, and as some of the teamsters who had left Fort Leavenworth with the company, and had come as far as San Francisco, were very desirous of going to the mines, Meek fitted out two or three with pack-horses, tools, and provisions, to accompany young Lane. For the money expended in the outfit he was to receive half [Pg 405] of their first year's profits. The result of this venture was three pickle-jars of gold-dust, which were sent to him by the hands of Nat. Lane, the following year; and which just about reimbursed him for the outlay.

At San Francisco, Gen. Lane found the U.S. Sloop of War, the *St. Mary's*; and Meek insisted that the Oregon government, which was represented in their persons, had a right to require her services in transporting itself to its proper seat. But Lane, whose notions of economy extended, singularly enough, to the affairs of the general government, would not consent to the needless expenditure. Meek was rebellious, and quoted Thornton, by whom he was determined not to be outdone in respect of expense for transportation. Lane insisted that his dignity did not require a government vessel to convey him to Oregon. In short the new government was very much divided against itself, and only escaped a fall by Meek's finding some one, or

some others, else, on whom to play his pranks.

The first one was a Jew peddler who had gentlemen's clothes to sell. To him the Marshal represented himself as a United States Custom officer, and after frightening him with a threat of confiscating his entire stock, finally compromised with the terrified Israelite by accepting a suit of clothes for himself. After enjoying the mortification of spirit which the loss inflicted on the Jew, for twenty-four hours, he finally paid him for the clothes, at the same time administering a lecture upon the sin and danger of smuggling.

The party which had left Leavenworth for Oregon nearly six months before, numbering fifty-five, now numbered only seven. Of the original number two had been killed, and all the rest had deserted to go to the mines. There remained only Gen. [Pg 406] Lane, Meek, Lieut. Hawkins and Hayden, surgeon, besides three soldiers. With this small company Gen. Lane went on board the *Jeanette*, a small vessel, crowded with miners, and destined for the Columbia River. As the *Jeanette* dropped down the Bay, a salute was fired from the *St. Mary's* in honor of Gen. Lane, and appropriated to himself by Marshal Meek, who seems to have delighted in appropriating to himself all the honors in whatever circumstances he might be placed; the more especially too, if such assumption annoyed the General.

After a tedious voyage of eighteen days the *Jeanette* arrived in the Columbia River. From Astoria the party took small boats for Oregon City, a voyage of one hundred and twenty miles; so that it was already the 2d of March when they arrived at that place, and only one day was left for the organization of the Territorial Government before the expiration of Polk's term of office.

On the 2d of March Gen. Lane arrived at Oregon City, and was introduced to Gov. Abernethy, by Marshal Meek. On the 3d, there appeared the following—

PROCLAMATION.

> In pursuance of an act of Congress, approved the 14th of August, in the year of our Lord 1848, establishing a Territorial Government in the Territory of Oregon:
>
> I, Joseph Lane, was, on the 18th day of August, in the year 1848, appointed Governor in and for the Territory of Oregon. I have therefore thought it proper to issue this, my proclamation, making known that I have this day entered upon the discharge of the duties of my office, and by virtue thereof do declare the laws of the United States extended over, and declared to be in force in said Territory, so far as the same, or any portion thereof may be applicable.
>
> Given under my hand at Oregon City, in the Territory of Oregon, this 3d day of March, Anno Domini 1849.
>
> JOSEPH LANE.

Thus Oregon had one day, under Polk, who, take it all in all, had been a faithful guardian of her interests. [Pg 407]

In the month of August, 1848, the *Honolulu*, a vessel of one hundred and fifty tons, owned in Boston, carrying a consignment of goods to a mercantile house in Portland, arrived at her anchorage in the Wallamet, *via* San Francisco, California. Captain Newell, almost before he had discharged freight, commenced buying up a cargo of flour and other provisions. But what excited the wonder of the Oregonians was the fact that he also bought up all manner of tools such as could be used in digging or cutting, from a spade and pickaxe, to a pocket-knife. This singular proceeding naturally aroused the suspicions of a people accustomed to have something to suspect. A demand was made for the *Honolulu's* papers, and these not being forthcoming, it was proposed by some of the prudent ones to tie her up. When this movement was attempted, the secret came out. Captain Newell, holding up a bag of gold-dust before the astonished eyes of his persecutors, cried out—

"Do you see that gold? —— you, I will depopulate your country! I know where there is plenty of this stuff, and I am taking these tools where it is to be found."

This was in August, the month of harvest. So great was the excitement which seized the people, that all classes of men were governed by it. Few persons stopped to consider that this was the time for producers to reap golden harvests of precious ore, for the other yellow harvest of grain which was already ripe and waiting to be gathered. Men left their grain standing, and took their teams from the reapers to pack their provisions and tools to the mines.

Some men would have gladly paid double to get back the spades, shovels, or picks, which the shrewd Yankee Captain had purchased from them a week previous. All implements of this nature soon commanded fabulous prices, and he was a lucky man who had a supply.

1850-4. The Territorial law of Oregon combined the offices of Governor and Indian Agent. One of the most important acts which marked Lane's administration was that of securing and punishing the murderers of Dr. and Mrs. Whitman. The Indians of the Cayuse tribe to whom the murderers belonged, were assured that the only way in which they could avoid a war with the whites was to deliver up the chiefs who had been engaged in the massacre, to be tried and punished according to the laws of the whites. Of the two hundred Indians implicated in the massacre, five were given up to be dealt with according to law. These were the five chiefs, *Te-lou-i-kite*, *Tam-a-has*, *Klok-a-mas*, *Ki-am-a-sump-kin*, and *I-sa-i-a-cha-lak-is*.

These men might have made their escape; there was no imperative necessity upon them to suffer death, had they chosen to flee to the mountains. But with that strange magnanimity which the savage often shows, to the astonishment of Christians, they resolved to die for their people rather than by their flight to involve them in war.

Early in the summer of 1850, the prisoners were delivered up to Gov. Lane, and brought down to Oregon City, where they were given into the keeping of the marshal. During their passage down the river, and while they were incarcerated at Oregon City, their bearing was most proud and haughty. Some food, more choice than their prisoner's fare, being offered to one of the chiefs at a camp of the guard, [Pg 409] in their transit down the Columbia, the proud savage rejected it with scorn.

"What sort of heart have you," he asked, "that you offer food to me, whose hands are red with your brother's blood?"

And this, after eleven years of missionary labor, was all the comprehension the savage nature knew of the main principle of Christianity,—forgiveness, or charity toward our enemies.

At Oregon City, Meek had many conversations with them. In all of these they gave but one explanation of their crime. They feared that Dr. Whitman intended, with the other whites, to take their land from them; and they were told by Jo Lewis, the half-breed, that the Doctor's medicine was intended to kill them off quickly, in order the sooner to get possession of their country. None of them expressed any sorrow for what had been done; but one of them, *Ki-am-a-sump-kin*, declared his innocence to the last.

In conversations with others, curious to gain some knowledge of the savage moral nature, *Te-lou-i-kite* often puzzled these students of Indian ethics. When questioned as to his motive for allowing himself to be taken, *Te-lou-i-kite* answered:

"Did not your missionaries tell us that Christ died to save his people? So die we, to save our people!"

Notwithstanding the prisoners were pre-doomed to death, a regular form of trial was gone through. The Prosecuting Attorney for the Territory, A. Holbrook, conducted the prosecution: Secretary Pritchett, Major Runnels, and Captain Claiborne, the defence. The fee offered by the chiefs was fifty head of horses. Whether it was compassion, or a love of horses which animated the defence, quite an effort was [Pg 410] made to show that the murderers were not guilty.

The presiding Justice was O.C. Pratt—Bryant having resigned. Perhaps we cannot do better than to give the Marshal's own description of the trial and execution, which is as follows: "Thar war a great many indictments, and a great many people in attendance at this court. The Grand Jury found true bills against the five Indians, and they war arraigned for trial. Captain Claiborne led off for the defence. He foamed and ranted like he war acting a play in some theatre. He knew about as much law as one of the Indians he war defending; and his gestures were so powerful that he smashed two tumblers that the Judge had ordered to be filled with cold water for him. After a time he gave out mentally and physically. Then came Major Runnels, who made a very good defence. But the Marshal thought they must do better, for they would never ride fifty head of horses with them speeches.

Mr. Pritchett closed for the defence with a very able argument; for he war a man of brains. But then followed Mr. Holbrook, for the prosecution, and he laid down the case so plain that the jury were convinced before they left the jury-box. When the Judge passed sentence of death on them, two of the chiefs showed no terror; but the other three were filled with horror and consternation that they could not conceal.

After court had adjourned, and Gov. Lane war gone South on some business with the Rogue River Indians, Secretary Pritchett came to me and told me that as he war now acting Governor he meant to reprieve the Indians. Said he to me, 'Now Meek, I want you to liberate them Indians, when you receive the order.' [Pg 411]

'Pritchett,' said I, 'so far as Meek is concerned, he would do anything for you.'

This talk pleased him; he said he 'war glad to hear it; and would go right off and

write the reprieve.'

'But,' said I, 'Pritchett, let us talk now like men. I have got in my pocket the death-warrant of them Indians, signed by Gov. Lane. The Marshal will execute them men, as certain as the day arrives.'

Pritchett looked surprised, and remarked—'That war not what you just said, that you would do anything for me.'

Said I, 'you were talking then to Meek,—not to the Marshal, who always does his duty.' At that he got mad and left.

When the 3d of June, the day of execution, arrived, Oregon City was thronged with people to witness it. I brought forth the five prisoners and placed them on a drop. Here the chief, who always declared his innocence, *Ki-am-i-sump-kin*, begged me to kill him with my knife,—for an Indian fears to be hanged,—but I soon put an end to his entreaties by cutting the rope which held the drop, with my tomahawk. As I said 'The Lord have mercy on your souls,' the trap fell, and the five Cayuses hung in the air. Three of them died instantly. The other two struggled for several minutes; the Little Chief, *Tam-a-has*, the longest. It was he who was cruel to my little girl at the time of the massacre; so I just put my foot on the knot to tighten it, and he got quiet. After thirty-five minutes they were taken down and buried."

Thus terminated a tragic chapter in the history of Oregon. Among the services which Thurston performed for the Territory, was getting an appropriation of $100,000, to pay the expenses of the Cayuse war. From the Spring of 1848, when all the whites, except the Catholic missionaries, were withdrawn from the upper country, for a period of several years, or until Government had made treaties with the tribes east of [Pg 412] the Cascades, no settlers were permitted to take up land in Eastern Oregon. During those years, the Indians, dissatisfied with the encroachments which they foresaw the whites would finally make upon their country, and incited by certain individuals who had suffered wrongs, or been punished for their own offences at the hands of the whites, finally combined, as it was supposed from the extent of the insurrection, and Oregon was involved in a three years Indian war, the history of which would fill a volume of considerable size.

When Meek returned to Oregon as marshal, with his fine clothes and his newly acquired social accomplishments, he was greeted with a cordial acknowledgment of his services, as well as admiration for his improved appearance. He was generally acknowledged to be the model of a handsome marshal, when clad in his half-military dress, and placed astride of a fine horse, in the execution of the more festive duties of marshal of a procession on some patriotic occasion.

But no amount of official responsibility could ever change him from a wag into a "grave and reverend seignior." No place nor occasion was sacred to him when the wild humor was on him.

At this same term of court, after the conviction of the Cayuse chiefs, there was a case before Judge Pratt, in which a man was charged with selling liquor to the Indians. In these cases Indian evidence was allowed, but the jury-room being up stairs, caused a good deal of annoyance in court; because when an Indian witness was wanted up stairs, a dozen or more who were not wanted would follow. The Judge's bench was so placed that it commanded a full view of the staircase and every one passing up or down it.

A call for some witness to go before the jury was followed on this occasion, as on all [Pg 413] others, by a general rush of the Indians, who were curious to witness the proceedings. One fat old squaw had got part way up the stairs, when the Marshal, full of wrath, seized her by a leg and dragged her down flat, at the same time holding the fat member so that it was pointed directly toward the Judge. A general explosion followed this *pointed* action, and the Judge grew very red in the face.

MEEK AS UNITED STATES MARSHAL.

"Mr. Marshal, come within the bar!" thundered the Judge.

Meek complied, with a very dubious expression of countenance.

"I must fine you fifty dollars," continued the Judge; "the dignity of the Court must be maintained."

When court had adjourned that evening, the Judge and the Marshal were walking toward their respective lodgings. Said Meek to his Honor: [Pg 414]

"Why did you fine me so heavily to-day?"

"I *must* do it," returned the Judge. "I must keep up the dignity of the Court; I must do it, if I pay the fines myself."

"And you *must* pay all the fines you lay on the marshal, of course," answered Meek.

"Very well," said the Judge; "I shall do so."

"All right, Judge. As I am the proper disbursing officer, you can pay that fifty dollars to me—and I'll take it now."

At this view of the case, his Honor was staggered for one moment, and could only swing his cane and laugh faintly. After a little reflection, he said:

"Marshal, when court is called to-morrow, I shall remit your fine; but don't you let me have occasion to fine you again!"

After the removal of the capital to Salem, in 1852, court was held in a new building, on which the carpenters were still at work. Judge Nelson, then presiding, was much put out by the noise of hammers, and sent the marshal more than once, to request the men to suspend their work during those hours when court was in session, but all to no purpose. Finally, when his forbearance was quite exhausted, he appealed to the marshal for advice.

"What shall I do, Meek," said he, "to stop that infernal noise?"

"Put the workmen on the Grand Jury," replied Meek.

"Summon them instantly!" returned the Judge. They were summoned, and quiet secured for that term.

At this same term of court, a great many of the foreign born settlers appeared, to file their intention of becoming American citizens, in order to secure the benefits of the Donation Law. Meek was retained as a witness, to swear to their qualifications, one of which was, that they were possessed of good moral characters. The first day there [Pg 415] were about two hundred who made declarations, Meek witnessing for most of them. On the day following, he declined serving any longer.

"What now?" inquired the Judge; "you made no objections yesterday."

"Very true," replied Meek; "and two hundred lies are enough for me. I swore that all those mountain-men were of 'good moral character,' and I never knew a mountain-man of that description in my life! Let Newell take the job for to-day."

The "job" was turned over to Newell; but whether the second lot was better than the first, has never transpired.

During Lane's administration, there was a murder committed by a party of Indians at the Sound, on the person of a Mr. Wallace. Owing to the sparse settlement of the country, Governor Lane adopted the original measure of exporting not only the officers of the court, but the jury also, to the Sound district. Meek was ordered to

find transportation for the court *in toto*, jury and all. Boats were hired and provisioned to take the party to the Cowelitz Landing, and from thence to Fort Steilacoom, horses were hired for the land transportation.

The Indians accused were five in number—two chiefs and three slaves. The Grand Jury found a true bill against the two chiefs, and let the slaves go. So few were the inhabitants of those parts, that the marshal was obliged to take a part of the grand jury to serve on the petite jury. The form of a trial was gone through with, the Judge delivered his charge, and the jury retired.

It was just after night-fall when these worthies betook themselves to the jury-room. One of them curled himself up in a corner of the room, with the injunction to the [Pg 416] others to "wake him up when they got ready to hang them —— rascals." The rest of the party spent four or five hours betting against monte, when, being sleepy also, they waked up their associate, spent about ten minutes in arguing their convictions, and returned a verdict of "guilty of murder in the first degree."

The Indians were sentenced to be hung at noon on the following day, and the marshal was at work early in the morning preparing a gallows. A rope was procured from a ship lying in the sound. At half-past eleven o'clock, guarded by a company of artillery from the fort, the miserable savages were marched forth to die. A large number of Indians were collected to witness the execution; and to prevent any attempt at rescue, Captain Hill's artillery formed a ring around the marshal and his prisoners. The execution was interrupted or delayed for some moments, on account of the frantic behavior of an Indian woman, wife of one of the chiefs, whose entreaties for the life of her husband were very affecting. Having exhausted all her eloquence in an appeal to the nobler feelings of the man, she finally promised to leave her husband and become his wife, if he, the marshal, would spare her lord and chief.

She was carried forcibly out of the ring, and the hanging took place. When the bodies were taken down, Meek spoke to the woman, telling her that now she could have her husband; but she only sullenly replied, "You have killed him, and you may bury him."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

While Meek was in Washington, he had been dubbed with the title of Colonel, which title he still bears, though during the Indian war of 1855-56, it was alternated with that of Major. During his marshalship he was fond of showing off his titles and authority to the discomfiture of that class of people who had "put on airs" with him in former days, when he was in his transition stage from a trapper to a United States Marshal.

While Pratt was Judge of the District Court, a kidnaping case came before him. The writ of *habeas corpus* having been disregarded by the Captain of the *Melvin*, who was implicated in the business, Meek was sent to arrest him, and also the first mate. Five of the *Melvin's* sailors were ordered to be summoned as witnesses, at the same time.

Meek went on board with his summons, marched forward, and called out the names of the men. Every man came up as he was summoned. When they were together, Meek ordered a boat lowered for their conveyance to Oregon City. The men started to obey, when the Captain interfered, saying that the boat should not be taken for such a purpose, as it belonged to him.

"That is of no consequence at all," answered the smiling marshal. "It is a very good boat, and will suit our purpose very well. Lower away, men!"

The men quickly dropped the boat. As it fell, they were ordered to man it. When they [Pg 418] were at the oars, the mate was then invited to take a seat in it, which he did, after a moment's hesitation, and glancing at his superior officer. Meek then turned to the Captain, and extended the same invitation to him. But he was reluctant to accept the courtesy, blustering considerably, and declaring his intention to remain where he was. Meek slowly drew his revolver, all the time cool and smiling.

"I don't like having to urge a gentleman too hard," he said, in a meaning tone; "but thar is an argument that few men ever resist. Take a seat, Captain."

The Captain took a seat; the idlers on shore cheered for "Joe Meek"—which was, after all, his most familiar title; the Captain and mate went to Oregon City, and were fined respectively $500 and $300; the men took advantage of being on shore to desert; and altogether, the master of the *Melvin* felt himself badly used.

About the same time news was received that a British vessel was unloading goods for the Hudson's Bay Company, somewhere on Puget Sound. Under the new order of affairs in Oregon, this was smuggling. Delighted with an opportunity of doing the

United States a service, and the British traders an ill turn, Marshal Meek immediately summoned a *posse* of men and started for the Sound. On his way he learned the name of the vessel and Captain, and recognized them as having been in the Columbia River some years before. On that occasion the Captain had ordered Meek ashore, when, led by his curiosity and general love of novelty, he had paid a visit to this vessel. This information was "nuts" to the marshal, who believed that "a turn about was fair play."

With great dispatch and secrecy he arrived entirely unexpected at the point where the vessel was lying, and proceeded to board her without loss of time. The Captain [Pg 419] and officers were taken by surprise and were all aghast at this unlooked for appearance. But after the first moment of agitation was over, the Captain recognized Meek, he being a man not likely to be forgotten, and thinking to turn this circumstance to advantage, approached him with the blandest of smiles and the most cordial manner, saying with forced frankness—

"I am sure I have had the pleasure of meeting you before. You must have been at Vancouver when my vessel was in the river, seven or eight years ago. I am very happy to have met with you again."

"Thar is some truth in that remark of yours, Captain," replied Meek, eyeing him with lofty scorn; "you *did* meet me at Vancouver several years ago. But I was nothing but 'Joe Meek' at that time, and you ordered me ashore. Circumstances are changed since then. I am now Colonel Joseph L. Meek, United States Marshal for Oregon Territory; and you sir, are only a —— smuggler! Go ashore, sir!"

The Captain saw the point of that concluding "go ashore, sir!" and obeyed with quite as bad a grace as 'Joe Meek' had done in the first instance.

The vessel was confiscated and sold, netting to the Government about $40,000, above expenses. This money, which fell into bad hands, failed to be accounted for. Nobody suspected the integrity of the marshal, but most persons suspected that he placed too much confidence in the District Attorney, who had charge of his accounts. On some one asking him, a short time after, what had become of the money from the sale of the smuggler, he seemed struck with a sudden surprise:

"Why," said he, looking astonished at the question, "thar was barly enough for the officers of the court!"

This answer, given as it was, with such apparent simplicity became a popular joke; [Pg 420] and "barly enough" was quoted on all occasions.

The truth was, that there was a serious deficiency in Meek's account with the Government, resulting entirely from his want of confidence in his own literary accomplishments, which led him to trust all his correspondence and his accounts to the hands of a man whose talents were more eminent than his sense of honor. The result of this misplaced confidence was a loss to the Government, and to himself, whom the Government held accountable. Contrary to the general rule of disbursing officers, the office made him poor instead of rich; and when on the incoming of the Pierce administration he suffered decapitation along with the other Territorial officers, he was forced to retire upon his farm on the Tualatin Plains, and become a rather indifferent tiller of the earth.

The breaking out of the Indian war of 1855-6, was preceded by a long period of uneasiness among the Indians generally. The large emigration which crossed the plains every year for California and Oregon was one cause of the disturbance; not only by exciting their fears for the possession of their lands, but by the temptation which was offered them to take toll of the travelers. Difficulties occurred at first between the emigrants and Indians concerning stolen property. These quarrels were followed, probably the subsequent year, by outrages and murder on the part of the Indians, and retaliation on the part of volunteer soldiers from Oregon. When once this system of outrage and retaliation on either side, was begun, there was an end of security, and war followed as an inevitable consequence. Very horrible indeed were the acts perpetrated by the Indians upon the emigrants to Oregon, during the years from 1852 to 1858.

But when at last the call to arms was made in Oregon, it was an opportunity sought, [Pg 421] and not an alternative forced upon them, by the politicians of that Territory. The occasion was simply this. A party of lawless wretches from the Sound Country, passing over the Cascade Mountains into the Yakima Valley, on their way to the Upper Columbia mines, found some Yakima women digging roots in a lonely place, and abused them. The women fled to their village and told the chiefs of the outrage; and a party followed the guilty whites and killed several of them in a fight.

Mr. Bolin, the Indian sub-agent for Washington went to the Yakima village, and instead of judging of the case impartially, made use of threats in the name of the United States Government, saying that an army should be sent to punish them for killing his people. On his return home, Mr. Bolin was followed and murdered.

The murder of an Indian agent was an act which could not be overlooked. Very properly, the case should have been taken notice of in a manner to convince the Indians that murder must be punished. But, tempted by an opportunity for gain, and encouraged by the somewhat reasonable fears of the white population of Washington and Oregon, Governor G.L. Curry, of the latter, at once proclaimed war, and issued a call for volunteers, without waiting for the sanction or assistance of the general Government. The moment this was done, it was too late to retract. It was as if a torch had been applied to a field of dry grass. So simultaneously did the Indians from Puget Sound to the Rocky Mountains, and from the Rocky Mountains to the southern boundary of Oregon send forth the war-whoop, that there was much justification for the belief which agitated the people, that a combination among the Indians had been secretly agreed to, and that the whites were all to be exterminated. [Pg 422]

Volunteer companies were already raised and sent into the Indian country, when Brevet Major G.O. Haller arrived at Vancouver, now a part of the United States. He had been as far east as Fort Boise to protect the incoming immigration; and finding on his return that there was an Indian war on hand, proceeded at once to the Yakima country with his small force of one hundred men, only fifty of whom were mounted. Much solicitude was felt for the result of the first engagement, every one knowing that if the Indians were at first successful, the war would be long and bloody.

Major Haller was defeated with considerable loss, and notwithstanding slight reinforcements, from Fort Vancouver, only succeeded in getting safely out of the country. Major Raines, the commanding officer at Vancouver, seeing the direction of events, made a requisition upon Governor Curry for four of his volunteer companies to go into the field. Then followed applications to Major Raines for horses and arms to equip the volunteers; but the horses at the Fort being unfit for service, and the Major unauthorized to equip volunteer troops, there resulted only misunderstandings and delays. When General Wool, at the head of the Department in San Francisco, was consulted, he also was without authority to employ or receive the volunteers; and when the volunteers, who at length armed and equipped themselves, came to go into the field with the regulars, they could not agree as to the mode of fighting Indians; so that with one thing and another, the war became an exciting topic for more reasons than because the whites were afraid of the Indians. As for General Wool, he was in great disfavor both in Oregon and Washington because he did not believe there ever had existed the necessity for a war; and that therefore he bestowed what assistance was at his command very grudgingly. General Wool, it was said, was jealous of the [Pg 423] volunteers; and the volunteers certainly cared little for the opinion of General Wool.

However all that may be, Col. Meek gives it as his opinion that the old General was right. "It makes me think," said he, "of a bear-fight I once saw in the Rocky Mountains, where a huge old grizzly was surrounded by a pack of ten or twelve dogs, all snapping at and worrying him. It made him powerful mad, and every now and then he would make a claw at one of them that silenced him at once."

The Indian war in Oregon gave practice to a number of officers, since become famous, most prominent among whom is Sheridan, who served in Oregon as a Lieutenant. Grant himself, was at one time a Captain on that frontier. Col. Wright, afterwards Gen. Wright, succeeded Major Raines at Vancouver, and conducted the war through its most active period. During a period of three years there were troops constantly occupied in trying to subdue the Indians in one quarter or another.

As for the volunteers they fared badly. On the first call to arms the people responded liberally. The proposition which the Governor made for their equipment was accepted, and they turned in their property at a certain valuation. When the war was over and the property sold, the men who had turned it in could not purchase it without paying more for it in gold and silver than it was valued at when it was placed in the hands of the Quartermaster. It was sold, however, and the money enjoyed by the shrewd political speculators, who thought an Indian war a very good investment.

Meek was one of the first to volunteer, and went as a private in Company A. On arriving at the Dalles he was detailed for special service by Col. J.W. Nesmith, and [Pg 424] sent out as pilot or messenger, whenever any such duty was required. He was finally placed on Nesmith's staff, and given the title of Major. In this capacity, as in every other, he was still the same alert and willing individual that we have always seen him, and not a whit less inclined to be merry when an opportunity offered.

While the army was in the Yakima country, it being an enemy's country, and provisions scarce, the troops sometimes were in want of rations. But Meek had not forgotten his mountain craft, and always had something to eat, if anybody did. One evening he had killed a fat cow which he had discovered astray, and was proceeding to roast a twenty-pound piece before his camp-fire, when a number of the officers called on him. The sight and savory smell of the beef was very grateful to them.

"Major Meek," said they in a breath, "we will sup with you to-night."

"I am very sorry, gentlemen, to decline the honor," returned Meek with a repetition of the innocent surprise for which he had so often been laughed at, "but I am very

hungry, and thar is barly enough beef for one man!"

On hearing this sober assertion, those who had heard the story laughed, but the rest looked rather aggrieved. However, the Major continued his cooking, and when the beef was done to a turn, he invited his visitors to the feast, and the evening passed merrily with jests and camp stories.

After the army went into winter-quarters, Nesmith having resigned, T.R. Cornelius was elected Colonel. One of his orders prohibited firing in camp, an order which as a good mountaineer the Major should have remembered. But having been instructed to proceed to Salem without delay, as bearer of dispatches, the Major committed the [Pg 425] error of firing his gun to see if it was in good condition for a trip through the enemy's country. Shortly after he received a message from his Colonel requesting him to repair to his tent. The Colonel received him politely, and invited him to breakfast with him. The aroma of coffee made this invitation peculiarly acceptable—for luxuries were scarce in camp—and the breakfast proceeded for some time very agreeably. When Meek had breakfasted, Colonel Cornelius took occasion to inquire if the Major had not heard his order against firing in camp. "Yes," said Meek. "Then," said the Colonel, "I shall be obliged to make an example of you."

While Meek stood aghast at the idea of punishment, a guard appeared at the door of the tent, and he heard what his punishment was to be, "Mark time for twenty minutes in the presence of the whole regiment."

"When the command "forward!" was given," says Meek, "you might have seen somebody step off lively, the officer counting it off, 'left, left.' But some of the regiment grumbled more about it than I did. I just got my horse and my dispatches and left for the lower country, and when I returned I asked for my discharge, and got it."

And here ends the career of our hero as a public man. The history of the young State, of which he is so old a pioneer furnishes ample material for an interesting volume, and will sometime be written by an abler than our sketchy pen.

PART II.

OUR

CENTENNIAL INDIAN WAR

AND THE

LIFE OF GENERAL CUSTER.

INTRODUCTION.

The reader of the foregoing pages can hardly have failed to observe, that the region east of the Big Horn Mountains, including the valleys of the Yellowstone, Big Horn, Powder, and Rosebud Rivers, was the favorite haunt of the Rocky Mountain hunters and trappers—the field of many of their stirring adventures and hardy exploits. Here was the "hunters' paradise," where they came to secure game for food and to feed their animals on the nutritious bark of the cottonwoods; here they assembled at the Summer rendezvous, to exchange their peltries for supplies; and here, ofttimes, was established their winter camp, with its rough cheer, athletic sports, and wild carousals.

Here, also, between the plains and the mountains, was the dark and sanguinary ground where terrific and deadly combats were fought between the Delawares, Iroquois, Crows, and Blackfeet, and between the trappers and Indians; and here, fifty years later, were enacted scenes of warfare and massacre which cast a gloom over the festivities of our Centennial anniversary.

The recent campaign against the hostile Sioux was over the identical ground where the fur-traders roamed intent on beaver-skins and adventure; and it is believed that some account thereof, and a sketch of the renowned Indian fighter who perished on the Little Big Horn, may appropriately supplement the story of the Mountain-men.

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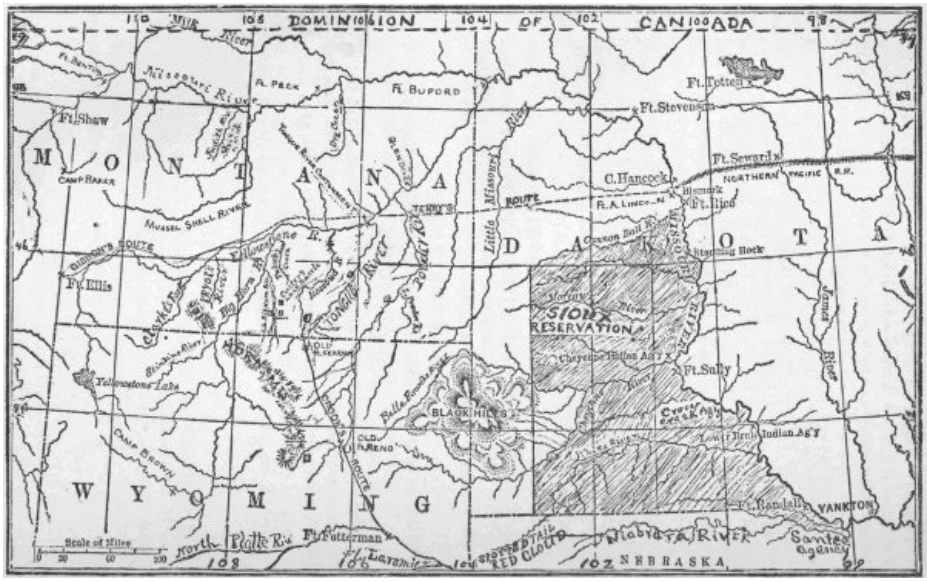

MAP OF THE SIOUX COUNTRY.

THE INDIAN WAR.

CHAPTER I.

THE SIOUX TRIBES—CAUSES OF THE WAR.

The scene of the campaign against the hostile Indians in 1876, was the rugged, desolate, and partially unexplored region lying between the Big Horn and Powder Rivers, and extending from the Big Horn Mountains northerly to and beyond the Yellowstone River. This region is the most isolated and inaccessible of any lying east of the Rocky Mountains, and is admirably adapted for Indian warfare and defense. Several rivers, tributaries of the Yellowstone, flow through it, and it abounds in creeks, ravines, and canyons. It is the hereditary country of the Crows, who for generations defended it against marauding tribes of Blackfeet.

A vivid description of the general aspect of the country and of the hardships and perils of our soldiers, has been given by Col. Nelson A. Miles, of the Fifth Infantry, in a letter written from the mouth of the Powder River. "No service," he says, "is more thankless or dangerous than contending against these treacherous savages, and if you will come out and learn the real sentiment of the army, you will find the officers of the army the strongest advocates of any peace policy that shall be just and honorable. You will find us out here, five hundred miles from railroad communication, in as barren, desolate and worthless a country as the sun shines [Pg 8] upon—volcanic, broken, and almost impassable—so rugged as to make our granite hills of Vermont and New Hampshire appear in comparison as pleasant parks. Jagged and precipitous cliffs; narrow and deep arroyos filled with massive boulders; alkali water, or for miles and miles none at all; and vegetation of cactus and sage-bushes, will represent to you, feebly indeed, the scene of the present campaign, in which we are contending against the most powerful, warlike, and best-armed body of savages on the American Continent, armed and mounted partly at the expense of the Government, and fully supplied with the most improved magazine guns and tons of metallic ammunition."

"The brave mariner," wrote a newspaper correspondent, "on the trackless ocean without compass, is no more at the mercy of wind and wave than Terry's army, out upon this vast trackless waste, is at the mercy of his guides and scouts. The sun rises in the east, shines all day upon a vast expanse of sage-brush and grass, and, as it sets in the west, casts its dull rays into a thousand ravines that neither man nor beast can cross. The magnet always points north; but whether one can go either north or south can be decided only by personal effort. An insignificant turn to the wrong side of a little knoll or buffalo-wallow ofttimes imperceptibly leads the voyager into ravine after ravine, over bluff after bluff, until at last he stands on the edge of a yawning canyon, hundreds of feet in depth and with perpendicular walls. Nothing is left for him to do but to retrace his steps and find an accessible route."

The hostile Indians with whom our soldiers have had to contend are no despicable foe; on the contrary they are quite able, in frontier warfare, to cope with disciplined [Pg 9]

troops. They fight in bodies, under skilled leaders, and have regular rules which they observe in battle, on their marches, and in their camps. "They have systems of signalling and of scouting, of posting sentinels and videttes, and of herding their animals." They are remarkably expert horsemen, and are so dependent on their steeds, that "a Sioux on foot is a Sioux warrior no longer." Gen. Crook testifies to their adroitness and skill as follows:—

> "When the Sioux Indian was armed with a bow and arrow he was more formidable, fighting as he does most of the time on horseback, than when he came into possession of the old fashioned muzzle loading rifle. But when he came into possession of the breech loader and metallic catridge, which allows him to load and fire from his horse with perfect ease, he became at once ten times more formidable. With the improved arms I have seen our friendly Indians, riding at full speed, shoot and kill a wolf, also on the run, while it is a rare thing that our troops can hit an Indian on horseback though the soldier may be on his feet at the time.
>
> "The Sioux is a cavalry soldier from the time he has intelligence enough to ride a horse or fire a gun. If he wishes to dismount, his hardy pony, educated by long usage, will graze around near where he has been left, ready when his master wants to mount either to move forward or escape. Even with their lodges and families they can move at the rate of fifty miles per day. They are perfectly familiar with the country, have their spies and hunting parties out all the time at distances of from twenty to fifty miles each way from their villages, know the number and movements of all the troops that may be operating against them, just about what they can probably do, and hence can choose their own times and places of conflict or avoid it altogether."

The primary causes of the hostilities of the Indians which made this campaign and previous ones against them necessary, extend far back and are too numerous to be here fully stated. The principal Indian grievances however, for which the government is responsible, are a failure to fulfil treaties, encroachment on reserved territories, and the dishonesty of agents. Col. Miles speaks of our relationship with the Indians for the last fifty years, as the dark page in our history, which, next to African slavery, has done more to disgrace our government, blacken our fair name, and reflect upon our civilization, than aught else. It has, he says, been a source of corruption and a disturbing element, unconfined to any one political party or class of individuals. [Pg 10]

Wendell Phillips asserts that the worst brutality which prurient malice ever falsely charged the Indian with, is but weak imitation of what the white man has often inflicted on Indian men, women and children; and that the Indian has never lifted his hand against us until provoked to it by misconduct on our part, compared with which, any misconduct of his is but dust in the balance.

The great difference in the condition and character of the Indians over the Canada line and our own, can only be accounted for by the different treatment they have received. The Canadian Indians are, on the whole, a harmless, honest people, who, though they are gradually disappearing before the white man, bear him no ill-will, but rather the contrary. Bishop Whipple of Minnesota, an earnest advocate of the peace policy, draws the following contrast:—

> "Here are two pictures—on one side of the line a nation has spent $500,000,000 in Indian war; a people who have not 100 miles between the Atlantic and the Pacific which has not been the scene of an Indian massacre; a government which has not passed twenty years without an Indian war; not one Indian tribe to whom it has given Christian civilization; and which celebrates its centennial year by another bloody Indian war. On the other side of the line there is the same greedy, dominant Anglo-Saxon race, and the same heathen. They have not spent one dollar in Indian war; they have had no Indian massacres. Why? In Canada the Indian treaty calls these men 'the Indian subjects of her Majesty.' When civilization approaches them they are placed on ample reservations; they receive aid in civilization; they have personal rights of property; they are amenable to law and are protected by law; they have schools, and Christian people delight to give them their best men to teach them the religion of Christ. We expend more than one hundred dollars to their one in caring for Indian wards." [Pg 11]

The results of the Indian disturbances, whatever their causes, have borne heavily on the hardy and enterprising settlers along the border. Of these citizens Gen. Crook says:—

> "I believe it is wrong for a Government as great and powerful as ours not to protect its frontier people from savages. I do not see why a man who has the courage to come out here and open the way for civilization in his own country, is not as much entitled to the protection of his Government as anybody else. I am not one of those who believe, as many missionaries sent out here by well-meaning eastern socities do, that the people of the frontiers are cut-throats, thieves, and murderers. I have been thrown among them for nearly 25 years of my life, and believe them to compare favorably in energy, intelligence and manhood with the best of their eastern brethren. They are mercilessly plundered by Indians without any attempt being made to punish the perpetrators, and when they ask for protection, they are told by some of our peace commissioners sent out to make further concessions to the Indians, that they have no business out here anyhow. I do not deny that my sympathies have been with the frontier people in their unequal contest against such obstacles. At the same time I do not wish to be understood as the unrelenting foe of the Indian."

The Sioux Indians, embracing several tribes, are the old Dakotahs, long known as among the bravest and most warlike aboriginals of this continent. They were steadily [Pg 12] pushed westward by the tide of civilization to the Great Plains north of the Platte, where they claimed as their own all the vast region west of the Missouri as far as they could roam or fight their way. They resisted the approach of all settlers and opposed the building of the Pacific Railroad.

In 1867, Congress sent out four civilians and three army officers as Peace Commissioners, who, in 1868, made a treaty with the Sioux, whereby for certain payments or stipulations, they agreed to surrender their claims to a vast tract of country, to live at peace with their neighbors, and to restrict themselves to a territory bounded south by Nebraska, west by the 104th meridian, and north by the 46th parallel of latitude—a territory as large as the State of Michigan. "They had the solemn pledge of the United States that they should be protected in the absolute and peaceable possession of the country thus set apart for them; and the constitution makes such treaties the highest of all authorities, and declares that they are binding upon every citizen."

In the western part of the Sioux territory, lying between the two forks of the Cheyenne River, is the Black Hills country with an area of four or five thousand square miles. Of the interior of this region up to 1874 nothing was known excepting from the indefinite reports of hunters who had penetrated therein. The arrival at a trading post of Indians who offered gold-dust for sale which they said was procured at the Black Hills, caused much excitement; and a military expedition of 1200 men was sent from Fort Lincoln in July 1874, to explore the Hills and ascertain if gold existed there. As was expected, no hostile enemy were encountered by the large expedition which thus invaded the Indian territory. A few lodges of Indians were met [Pg 13] in the Hills, and they ran away notwithstanding friendly overtures were made. An attempt was made to lead the pony of one mounted Indian to headquarters, but he got away, and a shot was fired after him which, says General Custer, wounded either the Indian or his pony as blood was found on the ground.

The geologists of the expedition reported that there was gold in the Black Hills, and miners and others began to flock thither. In 1875, troops were sent to remove the trespassers on the Indian reservation, but as fast as they compelled or persuaded the miners to go away others came to fill their places; and at the present date there are more settlers there than ever before.

Of the treaty of 1868 and the so-called peace policy then inaugurated various opinions are entertained. Gen. Sherman, a member of the commission, in his report for 1876, says:—

> "The commission had also to treat with other tribes at the south; viz,—the Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Kiowas and Commanches; were engaged for two years in visiting and confering with these scattered bands; and finally, in 1868, concluded many treaties, which were the best possible at that date, and which resulted in comparative peace on the Plains, by defining clearly the boundaries to be thereafter occupied by the various tribes, with the annuities in money, provisions, and goods to be paid the Indians for the relenquishment of their claims to this vast and indefinite region of land. At this time the Sioux nation consisted of many distinct tribes, and was estimated at 50,000, of whom some 8,000 were named as hostiles.
>
> "These Indians, as all others, were under the exclusive jurisdiction of the Indian Bureau, and only small garrisons of soldiers were called for at the several agencies, such as Red Cloud and Spotted Tail on the head of the White Earth River in Nebraska (outside their reservation), and at Standing Rock, Cheyenne, and Crow Creek on the [Pg 14] Missouri River, to protect the persons of the agents and their employes. About these several agencies were grouped the several bands of Sioux under various names, receiving food, clothing, etc., and undergoing the process of civilization; but from the time of the Peace Commission of 1868 to the date of this report, a number of Sioux, recognized as hostile or 'outlaws,' had remained out under the lead of Sitting Bull and a few other chiefs."
>
> "The so-called peace policy," says Bishop Whipple, "was commenced when we were at war. The Indian tribes were either openly hostile, or sullen and turbulent. The new policy was a marvellous success. I do honestly believe that it has done more for the civilization of the Indians than all which the Government has done before. Its only weakness was that the system was not reformed. The new work was fettered by all the faults and traditions of the old policy. The nation left 300,000 men living within our own borders without a vestige of government, without personal rights of property, without the slightest protection of person, property, or life. We persisted in telling these heathen tribes that they were independent nations. We sent out the bravest and best of our officers, some who had grown gray in the service of the country; men whose slightest word was as good as their bond—we sent them because the Indians would not doubt a soldier's honor. They made a treaty, and they pledged the nation's faith that no white man should enter that territory. I do not discuss its wisdom. The Executive and Senate ratified it.... A violation of its plain provisions was an act of deliberate perjury. In the words of Gen. Sherman, 'Civilization made its own compact with the weaker party; it was violated, but not by the savage.' The whole world knew that we violated that treaty, and the reason of the failure of the negotiations of last year was that our own commissioners did not have authority from Congress to offer

the Indians more than one-third of the sum they were already receiving under the old treaty."

"The Sioux Nation," says Gen. Crook, in his report of Sept. 1876, "numbers many thousands of warriors, and they have been encouraged in their insolent overbearing conduct by the fact, that those who participated in the wholesale massacre of the innocent people in Minnesota during the brief period that preceded their removal to [Pg 15] their present location, never received adequate punishment therefor. Following hard upon and as the apparent result of the massacre of over eighty officers and men of the army at Fort Phil Kearney, the Government abandoned three of its military posts, and made a treaty of unparalleled liberality with the perpetrators of these crimes, against whom any other nation would have prosecuted a vigorous war.

"Since that time the reservations, instead of being the abode of loyal Indians holding the terms of their agreement sacred, have been nothing but nests of disloyalty to their treaties and the Government, and scourges to the people whose misfortune it has been to be within the reach of the endurance of their ponies. And in this connection, I regret to say, they have been materially aided by sub-agents who have disgraced a bureau established for the propagation of peace and good will, man to man.

"What is the loyal condition of mind of a lot of savages, who will not allow the folds of the flag of the country to float over the very sugar, coffee and beef, they are kind enough to accept at the hands of the nation to which they have thus far dictated their own terms? Such has been the condition of things at the Red Cloud Agency.

"The hostile bands roamed over a vast extent of country, making the Agencies their base of supplies, their recruiting and ordinance depots, and were so closely connected by intermarriage, interest and common cause with the Agency Indians, that it was difficult to determine where the line of peaceably disposed ceased and the hostile commenced. They have, without interruption, attacked persons at home, murdered and scalped them, stolen their stock—in fact violated every leading feature in the treaty. Indeed, so great were their depredations on the stock belonging to the settlers, that at certain times they have not had sufficient horses to do their ordinary farming work—all the horses being concentrated on the Sioux Reservation or among the bands which owe allegiance to what is called the Sioux Nation. In the winter months these renegade bands dwindle down to a comparatively small number; while in summer they are recruited by restless spirits from the different reservations, attracted by the opportunity to plunder the frontiersman, so that by midsummer they become augmented from small bands of one hundred to thousands.

"In fact, it was well known that the treaty of 1868 had been regarded by the Indians as an instrument binding on us but not binding on them. On the part of the [Pg 16] Government, notwithstanding the utter disregard by the Sioux of the terms of the treaty, stringent orders, enforced by military power, had been issued prohibiting settlers from trespassing upon the country known as the Black Hills. The people of the country against whom the provisions of the treaty were so rigidly enforced naturally complained that if they were required to observe this treaty, some effort should be made to compel the Indians to observe it likewise.

"The occupation by the settlers of the Black Hills country had nothing to do with the hostilities which have been in progress. In fact, by the continuous violations by these Indians of the treaty referred to, the settlers were furnished with at least a reasonable excuse for such occupation, in that a treaty so long and persistently violated by the Indians themselves, should not be quoted as a valid instrument for the preventing of such occupation. Since the occupation of the Black Hills there has not been any greater number of depredations committed by the Indians than previous to such occupation; in truth, the people who have gone to the Hills have not suffered any more and probably not as much from Indians, as they would had they remained at their homes along the border."

"In 1868," says Wm. R. Steele, delegate from Wyoming, "the United States made a treaty with the Sioux Nation, which was a grave mistake, if it was not a national dishonor and disgrace; that treaty has been the foundation of all the difficulties in the Sioux country. In 1866, Gen. Pope established posts at Fort Phil Kearney, Reno, and Fort Smith, so as to open the road to Montana and protect the country and friendly Crows from the hostile Sioux. In keeping these posts and opening that road, many men, citizens and soldiers, had been killed. Notable among the actions that had taken place was the massacre of Fetterman and his command at Fort Phil Kearney; and yet after these men had sacrificed their lives, the Government went to work and made a treaty by which it ignominiously abandoned that country to these savages, dismantling its own forts, and leaving there the bones of men who had laid down their lives in the wilderness. Was it to be wondered at, under these circumstances, that Sitting Bull and his men believed they were superior to the general government? Any body who knows anything about Indian nature knows that the legitimate result of that cowardly policy [Pg 17] of peace at any price, was to defer only the evil day which has now come upon us. Since that time the Sioux have been constantly depredating on the frontiers of Nebraska, Wyoming and Montana, and more men have fallen there in the peaceful vocations of civil life, without a murmur being heard, than fell under the gallant Custer. The friendly Crows have been raided with every full moon; so with the Shoshones; and at last these outrages have become so great and so long continued that even the peaceable Indian Department could not stand them any longer, and called on the military arm of the Government to punish these men."

President Grant, in his message of December, 1876, uses the following language:—"A policy has been adopted towards the Indian tribes inhabiting a large portion of the territory of the United States, which has been humane, and has substantially ended

> Indian hostilities in the whole land, except in a portion of Nebraska, and Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana territories, the Black Hills region, and approaches thereto. Hostilities there have grown out of the avarice of the white man, who has violated our treaty stipulations in his search for gold. The question might be asked, why the Government had not enforced obedience to the terms of the treaty prohibiting the occupation of the Black Hills region by whites? The answer is simple. The first immigrants to the Black Hills were removed by troops, but rumors of rich discoveries of gold took into that region increased numbers. Gold has actually been found in paying quantity, and an effort to remove the miners would only result in the desertion of the bulk of the troops that might be sent there to remove them."

The causes and objects of the military operations against the Sioux in 1876, as stated by the Secretary of War in a letter to the President dated July 8th, 1876, were in part as follows:—

> "The present military operations are not against the Sioux nation at all, but against certain hostile parts of it which defy the Government, and are undertaken at the special request of the bureau of the Government charged with their supervision, and wholly to make the civilization of the remainder possible. No part of these operations [Pg 18]
> are on or near the Sioux reservation. The accidental discovery of gold on the western border of the Sioux reservation and the intrusion of our people thereon have not caused this war, and have only complicated it by the uncertainty of numbers to be encountered. The young warriors love war, and frequently escape their agents to go to the hunt or war path—their only idea of the object of life. The object of these military expeditions was in the interest of the peaceful parts of the Sioux nation, supposed to embrace at least nine-tenths of the whole, and not one of these peaceful treaty Indians has been molested by the military authorities."

Of the hostile Indians referred to by the Secretary of War, Hon. E.P. Smith, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, reported Nov. 1st, 1875:—"It will probably be found necessary to compel the Northern non-treaty Sioux, under the leadership of Sitting Bull, who have never yet in any way recognized the United States Government, except by snatching rations occasionally at an agency, and such outlaws from the several agencies as have attached themselves to these same hostiles, to cease marauding and settle down, as the other Sioux have done, at some designated point."

Soon afterwards, Indian Inspector E.C. Watkins addressed the Commissioner respecting these Indians, as follows:—"The true policy in my judgment is to send troops against them in winter, the sooner the better, and whip them into subjection. They richly merit punishment for their incessant warfare and their numerous murders of white settlers and their families, or white men whenever found unarmed."

Early in December, by the advice of the Secretary of the Interior, Commissioner Smith directed that runners be sent out to notify "said Indian Sitting Bull, and others outside their reservation, that they must move to the reservation before the 31st day of January, 1876; that if they neglect or refuse so to move, they will be reported to [Pg 19]
the War Department as hostile Indians, and that a military force will be sent to compel them to obey the order of the Indian officer." Respecting this order to the Indians, Bishop Whipple, in a letter to the *New York Tribune*, says:—

> "There was an inadequate supply of provisions at the agencies that Fall, and the Indians went out to their unceded territory to hunt. They went as they were accustomed to do—with the consent of their agents and as provided by the treaty. * * * The Indians had gone a way from the agencies to secure food, and skins for clothing. The United States had set apart this very country as a hunting-ground for them forever. Eight months after this order to return or be treated as hostile, Congress appropriated money for the seventh of thirty installments for these roaming Indians. It was impossible for the Indians to obey the order. No one of the runners sent out to inform the Indians, was able to return himself by the time appointed; yet Indian women and children were expected to travel a treeless desert, without food or proper clothing, under the penalty of death."

As the order and warning were disregarded by the Indians, the Secretary of the Interior notified the Secretary of War, Feb. 1st, 1876, that "the time given him (Sitting Bull) in which to return to an agency having expired, and advices received at the Indian Office being to the effect that Sitting Bull still refuses to comply with the direction of the Commissioner, the said Indians are hereby turned over to the War Department for such action on the part of the army as you may deem proper under the circumstances."

By direction of Lieut. General Sheridan, Commander over the vast extent of territory included in the Military Division of Missouri, Brig. Gen. George Crook, Commander of the Department of the Platte, an officer of great merit and experience in Indian fighting, now undertook to reduce these Indian outlaws to subjection, and made preparations for an expedition against them.

CHAPTER II.

General Crook started from Fort Fetterman, W.T., March 1st, 1876, at the head of an expedition composed of ten companies of the 2d and 3d Cavalry under Col. J.J. Reynolds, and two companies of the 4th Infantry, with teamsters, guides, etc., amounting in all to nearly nine hundred men. His course was nearly north, past the abandoned Forts Reno and Phil. Kearney to Tongue River. He descended this river nearly to the Yellowstone, scouted Rosebud River, and then changed his course to the south-east toward Powder River. At a point on the head of Otter Creek, Crook divided his command, and sent Col. Reynolds with six companies of cavalry and one day's rations to follow the trail of two Indians discovered that day in the snow.

Col. Reynolds moved at 5 P.M. of the 16th, and at 4.20 A.M., after a night's march of thirty miles, was near the forks of Powder River. The following extracts are copied from a letter written to the *New York Tribune*:—

> "A halt was called here and the column took shelter in a ravine. No fires were allowed to be kindled, nor even a match lighted. The cold was intense and seemed to be at least 30° below zero. The command remained here till about 6 o'clock, doing their uttermost to keep from freezing, the scouts meantime going out to reconnoitre. At this hour they returned, reporting a larger and fresher trail leading down to the river which was about four miles distant. The column immediately started on the trail. The approach to the river seemed almost impracticable. Before reaching the final precipices which overlooked the riverbed, the scouts discovered that a village lay in the valley at the foot of the bluffs. It was now 8 o'clock. The sun shone brightly through the cold frosty air. [Pg 21]
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> "The column halted, and Noyes's battalion, 2d Cavalry, was ordered up to the front. It consisted of Company I, Capt. Noyes, and Company K, Capt. Egan. This battalion was ordered to descend to the valley, and while Egan charged the camp, Noyes was to cut out the herd of horses feeding close by and drive it up the river. Capt. Moore's battalion of two companies was ordered to dismount and proceed along the edge of the ridge to a position covering the eastern side of the village opposite that from which Egan was to charge. Capt. Mills's battalion was ordered to follow Egan dismounted, and support him in the engagement which might follow the charge.
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> "These columns began the descent of the mountain, through gorges which were almost perpendicular. Nearly two hours were occupied in getting the horses of the charging columns down these rough sides of the mountain, and even then, when a point was reached where the men could mount their horses and proceed toward the village in the narrow valley beneath, Moore's battalion had not been able to gain its position on the eastern side after clambering along the edges of the mountain. A few Indians could be seen with the herd, driving it to the edge of the river, but nothing indicated that they knew of our approach.
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> "Just at 9 o'clock Capt. Egan turned the point of the mountain nearest the river, and first in a walk and then in a rapid trot started for the village. The company went first in column of twos, but when within 200 yards of the village the command 'Left front into line' was given, and with a yell they rushed into the encampment. Capt. Noyes had in the meantime wheeled to the right and started the herd up the river. With the yell of the charging column the Indians sprang up as if by magic and poured in a rapid fire from all sides. Egan charged through and through the village before Moore's and Mills's battalions got within supporting distance, and finding things getting very hot, formed his line in some high willows on the south side of the camp, from which he poured in rapid volleys upon the Indians. [Pg 22]
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> "Up to this time the Indians supposed that one company was all they had to contend with, but when the other battalions appeared, rapidly advancing, deployed as skirmishers and pouring in a galling fire of musketry, they broke on all sides and took refuge in the rocks along the side of the mountain. The camp, consisting of 110 lodges, with immense quantities of robes, fresh meat, and plunder of all kinds, with over 700 head of horses were in our possession. The work of burning immediately began, and soon the whole encampment was in flames.
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> "After the work of destruction was completed the whole command moved rapidly up the river twenty miles to Lodgepole Creek. This point was reached at nightfall by all except Moore's battalion and Egan's company. Company E was the rear guard, and assisted Major Stanton and the scouts in bringing up the herd of horses; many of these were shot on the road, and the remainder reached camp about 9 P.M. These troops had been in the saddle for 36 hours, with the exception of five hours during which they were fighting, and all, officers and men, were much exhausted.
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> "Upon arriving at Lodgepole, it was found that General Crook and the other four companies and pack-train had not arrived, so that everybody was supperless and without a blanket. The night, therefore, was not a cheerful one, but not a murmur was heard. The tired men lay upon the snow or leaned against a tree, and slept as best they could on so cold a night. Saturday, at noon, General Crook arrived. In the meantime a portion of the herd of horses had straggled into the ravines, and fallen into the hands of the Indians."

The village thus destroyed was that of Crazy Horse, one of the avowedly hostile chiefs. "He had with him," wrote Gen. Crook, "the Northern Cheyennes, and some of the Minneconjous—probably in all one-half of the Indians off the reservations." The Indian loss was unknown. Four of Reynolds' men were killed, and six men including

one officer were wounded. The whole force subsequently returned to Fort Fetterman, reaching there March 26th.

The results of this expedition were neither conclusive or satisfactory. Therefore, Gen. Sheridan determined to proceed more systematically by concentric movements. He ordered three distinct columns to be prepared to move to a common centre, where the hostiles were supposed to be, from Montana, from Dakota, and from the Platte. The two former fell under the command of Gen. Alfred H. Terry, Commander of the Department of Dakota, and the latter under Gen. Crook. These movements were to be simultaneous, so that Indians avoiding one column might be encountered by another. [Pg 23]

Gen. Crook marched from Fort Fetterman on the 29th of May, with two battalions of the 2d and 3d Cavalry under Lieut. Col. W.B. Royall, and a battalion of five companies of the 4th and 9th Infantry under Major Alex. Chambers, with a train of wagons, pack-mules, and Indian scouts, all amounting to 47 officers and 1,000 men present for duty. This expedition marched by the same route as the preceding one, to a point on Goose Creek, which is the head of Tongue River, where a supply camp was established on June 8th. During the preceding night a party of Sioux came down on the encampment, and endeavored to stampede the horses, bringing on an engagement which resulted in the discomfiture and retreat of the enemy. On the 14th, a band of Shoshones and Crows—Indians unfriendly to the Sioux—joined Crook, and were provided with arms and ammunition.

The aggressive column of the expedition resumed the march forward on the morning of the 16th, leaving the trains parked at the Goose Creek camp. The infantry were mounted on mules borrowed from the pack-train, and each man carried his own supplies consisting of only three days' rations and one blanket. At night, after marching about 35 miles, the little army encamped between high bluffs at the head waters of Rosebud River. [Pg 24]

At 5 A.M. on the morning of the 17th the troops started down the valley of the Rosebud, the Indian allies marching in front and on the flanks. After advancing about seven miles successive shots were heard in front, the scouts came running in to report Indians advancing, and Gen. Crook had hardly time to form his men, before large numbers of warriors fully prepared for a fight were in view.

The battle which ensued was on both banks of the Rosebud, near the upper end of a deep canyon having sides which were steep, covered with pine, and apparently impregnable, through which the stream ran. The Indians displayed a strong force at all points, and contested the ground with a tenacity which indicated that they were fighting for time to remove their village, which was supposed to be about six miles down the Rosebud at the lower end of the canyon, or believed themselves strong enough to defeat their opponents.

The officers and men of Crook's command behaved with marked gallantry during the engagement. The Sioux were finally repulsed in their bold onset, and lost many of their bravest warriors; but when they fled they could not be pursued far without great danger owing to the roughness of the country. The Indian allies were full of enthusiasm but not very manageable, preferring to fight independently of orders. Crook's losses were nine soldiers killed, and twenty-one wounded, including Capt. Henry of the 3d Cavalry. Seven of the friendly Indians were wounded, and one was killed. [Pg 25]

Gen. Crook was satisfied that the number and quality of the enemy required more men than he had, and being encumbered with wounded he concluded to retreat. The night was passed on the battle-field, and the next day he started for his camp on Goose Creek, which was reached June 19th. Couriers were sent to Fort Fetterman for reinforcements and supplies, and the command remained inactive for several weeks awaiting their arrival.

The battle of the Rosebud was fought not very far from the scene of Custer's defeat a few days later, and Gen. Crook concludes that his opponents were the same that Custer and Reno encountered.

"It now became apparent," says Gen. Sheridan in his report "that Gen. Crook had not only Crazy Horse and his small band to contend with, but that the hostile force had been augmented by large numbers of the young warriors from the agencies along the Missouri River, and the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies in Nebraska, and that the Indian agents at these agencies had concealed the fact of the departure of these warriors, and that in most cases they continued to issue rations as though they were present."

CHAPTER III.

General Terry left Fort Abraham Lincoln on the Missouri River, May 17th 1876, with his division, consisting of the 7th Cavalry under Lieut. Col. George A. Custer, three companies of infantry, a battery of Gatling guns, and 45 enlisted scouts. His whole force, exclusive of the wagon-train drivers, numbered about 1000 men. His march was westerly, over the route taken by the Stanley expedition in 1873.

On the 11th of June, Terry reached the south bank of the Yellowstone at the mouth of Powder River, where by appointment he met steamboats, and established his supply camp. A scouting party of six companies of the 7th Cavalry under Major M.A. Reno was sent out June 10th, which ascended Powder River to its forks, crossed westerly to Tongue River and beyond, and discovered, near Rosebud River, a heavy Indian trail about ten days old leading westward toward Little Big Horn River. After following this trail a short distance Reno returned to the Yellowstone and rejoined his regiment, which then marched, accompanied by steamboats, to the mouth of Rosebud River where it encamped June 21st. Communication by steamboats and scouts had previously been opened with Col. John Gibbon, whose column was at this time encamped on the north side of the Yellowstone, near by. [Pg 27]

Col. Gibbon of the 7th Infantry had left Fort Ellis in Montana about the middle of May, with a force consisting of six companies of his regiment, and four companies of the 2d Cavalry under Major J.S. Brisbin. He had marched eastward down the north bank of the Yellowstone to the mouth of the Rosebud, where he encamped about June 1st.

Gen. Terry now consulted with Gibbon and Custer, and decided upon a plan for attacking the Indians who were believed to be assembled in large numbers near Big Horn River. Custer with his regiment was to ascend the valley of the Rosebud, and then turn towards Little Big Horn River, keeping well to the south. Gibbon's troops were to cross the Yellowstone at the mouth of Big Horn River, and march up the Big Horn to its junction with the Little Big Horn, to co-operate with Custer. It was hoped that the Indians would thus be brought between the two forces so that their escape would be impossible.

Col. Gibbon's column was immediately put in motion for the mouth of the Big Horn. On the next day, June 22d, at noon, Custer announced himself ready to start, and drew out his regiment. It consisted of 12 companies, numbering 28 officers and 747 soldiers. There were also a strong detachment of scouts and guides, several civilians, and a supply train of 185 pack mules. Gen. Terry reviewed the column in the presence of Gibbon and Brisbin, and it was pronounced in splendid condition. "The officers clustered around Terry for a final shake of the hand, the last good-bye was said, and in the best of spirits, filled with high hopes, they galloped away—many of them to their death." [Pg 28]

Gen. Terry's orders to Custer were as follows:—

CAMP AT THE MOUTH OF ROSEBUD RIVER,
June 22d, 1876.

Lieut. Col. Custer, 7th Cavalry.

COLONEL: The Brigadier General Commanding directs that as soon as your regiment can be made ready for the march, you proceed up the Rosebud in pursuit of the Indians whose trail was discovered by Major Reno a few days ago. It is, of course, impossible to give any definite instructions in regard to this movement, and, were it not impossible to do so, the Department Commander places too much confidence in your zeal, energy, and ability to wish to impose upon you precise orders which might hamper your action when nearly in contact with the enemy. He will, however, indicate to you his own views of what your action should be, and he desires that you should conform to them unless you shall see sufficient reason for departing from them. He thinks that you should proceed up the Rosebud until you ascertain definitely the direction in which the trail above spoken of leads. Should it be found (as it appears to be almost certain that it will be found) to turn towards the Little Big Horn, he thinks that you should still proceed southward perhaps as far as the head waters of the Tongue, and then turn toward the Little Big Horn, feeling constantly, however, to your left, so as to preclude the possibility of the escape of the Indians to the south or south-east by passing around your left flank. The column of Col. Gibbon is now in motion for the mouth of the Big Horn. As soon as it reaches that point it will cross the Yellowstone, and move up at least as far as the forks of the Big and Little Big Horn. Of course its future movements must be controlled by circumstances as they arise; but it is hoped that the Indians, if up on the Little Big Horn, may be so nearly inclosed by the two columns that their escape will be impossible. The Department Commander desires that on your way up the Rosebud you should thoroughly examine the upper part of Tulloch's Creek, and that you should endeavor to send a scout through to Col. Gibbon's column with information of the result of your examination. The lower part of this creek will be examined by a detachment from Col. Gibbon's command. The supply steamer will be pushed up the Big Horn as far as the forks of the river are found to be navigable for that space, and the Department Commander, who will accompany the column of Col. Gibbon, desires you to report to him there not later than the expiration of the time for which your troops are rationed, unless in the meantime you receive [Pg 29]

further orders. Respectfully, &c.,

E.W. Smith, Captain 18th Infantry,

Acting Assistant Adjutant General.

After proceeding southerly up the Rosebud for about seventy miles, Custer, at 11 P.M. on the night of the 24th, turned westerly towards Little Big Horn River. The next morning while crossing the elevated land between the two rivers, a large Indian village was discovered about fifteen miles distant, just across Little Big Horn River. Custer with characteristic promptness decided to attack the village at once.

One company was escorting the train at the rear. The balance of the force was divided into three columns. The trail they were on led down to the stream at a point some distance south of the village. Major Reno, with three companies under Capt. T.H. French, Capt. Myles Moylan, and Lieut. Donald Mclntosh, was ordered to follow the trail, cross the stream, and charge down its north bank. Capt. F.W. Benteen, with his own company and two others under Capt. T. B. Weir and Lieut. E.S. Godfrey, was sent to make a detour to the south of Reno. The other five companies of the regiment, under the immediate command of Custer, formed the right of the little army.

On reaching the river Reno crossed it as ordered, and Custer with his five companies turned northerly into a ravine running behind the bluffs on the east side of the stream.

CHAPTER IV.

GIBBON'S MARCH UP THE BIG HORN RIVER.

The supply steamer Far West with Gen. Terry and Col. Gibbon on board, which steamed up the Yellowstone on the evening of June 23d, overtook Gibbon's troops near the mouth of the Big Horn early on the morning of the 24th; and by 4 o'clock P.M. of the same day, the entire command with the animals and supplies had been ferried over to the south side of the Yellowstone. An hour later the column marched out to and across Tulloch's Creek, and then encamped for the night.

At 5 o'clock on the morning of the 25th, (Sunday) the column was again in motion; and after marching 22 miles over a country so rugged as to task the endurance of the men to the utmost, the infantry halted for the night. Gen. Terry, however, with the cavalry and the battery pushed on 14 miles further in hopes of opening communication with Custer, and camped at midnight near the mouth of the Little Big Horn.

Scouts sent out from Terry's camp early on the morning of the 26th discovered three Indians, who proved to be Crows who had accompanied Custer's regiment. They reported that a battle had been fought and that the Indians were killing white men in great numbers. Their story was not fully credited, as it was not expected that a conflict would occur so soon, or believed that serious disaster could have overtaken so large a force. [Pg 31]

The infantry, which had broken camp very early, now came up, and the whole column crossed the Little Big Horn and moved up its western valley. It was soon reported that a dense heavy smoke was resting over the southern horizon far ahead, and in a short time it became visible to all. This was hailed as a sign that Custer had met the Indians, defeated them, and burned their village. The weary foot soldiers were elated and freshened by the sight, and pressed on with increased spirit and speed.

Custer's position was believed to be not far ahead, and efforts were repeatedly made during the afternoon to open communication with him; but the scouts who attempted to go through were met and driven back by hostile Indians who were hovering in the front. As evening came on, their numbers increased and large parties could be seen on the bluffs hurrying from place to place and watching every movement of the advancing soldiers.

At 8:40 in the evening the infantry had marched that day about 30 miles. The forks of the Big Horn, the place where Terry had requested Custer to report to him, were many miles behind and the expected messenger from Custer had not arrived. Daylight was fading, the men were fatigued, and the column was therefore halted for the night. The animals were picketed, guards were set, and the weary men, wrapped in their blankets and with their weapons beside them, were soon asleep on the ground.

Early on the morning of the 27th the march up the Little Big Horn was resumed. The smoke cloud was still visible and apparently but a short distance ahead. Soon a dense grove of trees was reached and passed through cautiously, and then the head of the column entered a beautiful level meadow about a mile in width, extending along the [Pg 32]

west side of the stream and overshadowed east and west by high bluffs. It soon became apparent that this meadow had recently been the site of an immense Indian village, and the great number of temporary brushwood and willow huts indicated that many Indians beside the usual inhabitants had rendezvoused there. It was also evident that it had been hastily deserted. Hundreds of lodge-poles, with finely-dressed buffalo-robes and other hides, dried meat, stores, axes, utensils, and Indian trinkets were left behind; and in two tepees or lodges still standing, were the bodies of nine Indians who had gone to the "happy hunting-grounds."

Every step of the march now revealed some evidence that a conflict had taken place not far away. The dead bodies of Indian horses were seen, and cavalry equipments and weapons, bullet-pierced clothing, and blood-stained gloves were picked up; and at last the bodies of soldiers and their horses gave positive proof that a disastrous battle had taken place. The Crow Indians had told the truth.

The head of the column was now met by a breathless scout, who came running up with the intelligence that Major Reno with a body of troops was intrenched on a bluff further on, awaiting relief. The soldiers pushed ahead in the direction pointed out, and soon came in sight of men and horses intrenched on top of a hill on the opposite or east side of the river. Terry and Gibbon immediately forded the stream and rode toward the group. As they approached the top of the hill, they were welcomed by [Pg 33] hearty cheers from a swarm of soldiers who came out of their intrenchments to meet their deliverers. The scene was a touching one. Stout-hearted soldiers who had kept bravely up during the hours of conflict and danger now cried like children, and the pale faces of the wounded lighted up as hope revived within them.

The story of the relieved men briefly told was as follows:—After separating from Custer about noon, June 25th, (as related in the last chapter) Reno proceeded to the river, forded it, and charged down its west bank toward the village, meeting at first with but little resistance. Soon however he was attacked by such numbers as to be obliged to dismount his men, shelter his horses in a strip of woods, and fight on foot. Finding that they would soon be surrounded and defeated, he again mounted his men, and charging upon such of the enemy as obstructed his way, retreated across the river, and reached the top of a bluff followed closely by Indians. Just then Benteen, returning from his detour southward, discovered Reno's perilous position, drove back the Indians, and joined him on the hill. Shortly afterward, the company which was escorting the mule train also joined Reno. The seven companies thus brought together had been subsequently assailed by Indians; many of the men had been killed and wounded, and it was only by obstinate resistance that they had been enabled to defend themselves in an entrenched position. The enemy had retired on the evening of the 26th.

After congratulations to Reno and his brave men for their successful defence enquiries were made respecting Custer, but no one could tell where he was. Neither he or any of his men had been seen since the fight commenced, and the musketry heard from the direction he took had ceased on the afternoon of the 25th. It was [Pg 34] supposed by Reno and Benteen that he had been repulsed, and retreated northerly towards Terry's troops.

A search for Custer and his men was immediately began, and it revealed a scene calculated to appal the stoutest heart. Although neither Custer or any of that part of his regiment which he led to combat were found alive to tell the tale, an examination of their trail and the scene of conflict enabled their comrades to form some idea of the engagement in which they perished.

CHAPTER V.

CUSTER'S LAST BATTLE.

General Custer's trail, from the place where he left Reno's and turned northward, passed along and in the rear of the crest of hills on the east bank of the stream for nearly three miles, and then led, through an opening in the bluff, down to the river.

Here Custer had evidently attempted to cross over to attack the village. The trail then turned back on itself, as if Custer had been repulsed and obliged to retreat, and branched to the northward, as if he had been prevented from returning southerly by the way he came, or had determined to retreat in the direction from which Terry's troops were advancing.

Several theories as to the subsequent movements of the troops have been entertained by persons who visited the grounds. One is, that the soldiers in retreating took advantage of two ravines; that two companies under Capt. T.W. Custer and Lieut. A. E. Smith, were led by Gen. Custer up the ravine nearest the river, while the upper ravine furnished a line of retreat for the three companies of Capt. G.W. Yates, Capt. M.W. Keogh, and Lieut. James Calhoun. At the head of this upper ravine, a mile from the river, a stand had been made by Calhoun's company; the skirmish lines were marked by rows of the slain with heaps of empty cartridge shells before them, and Lieuts. Calhoun and Crittenden lay dead just behind the files. [Pg 36]
Further on, Capt. Keogh had fallen surrounded by his men; and still further on, upon a hill, Capt. Yates' company took its final stand. Here, according to this theory, Yates was joined by what remained of the other two companies, who had been furiously assailed in the lower ravine; and here Gen. Custer and the last survivors of the five companies met their death, fighting bravely to the end.

Another theory of the engagement is, that Custer attempted to retreat up the lower ravine in columns of companies; that the companies of Custer and Smith being first in the advance and last in the retreat, fell first in the slaughter which followed the retrograde movement; that Yates' company took the position on the hill, and perished there with Custer and other officers; and that the two other companies, Keogh's and Calhoun's, perished while fighting their way back towards Reno—a few reaching the place where Custer first struck the high banks of the river.

Still another theory is, that the main line of retreat was by the upper ravine; that Calhoun's company was thrown across to check the Indians, and was the first annihilated. That the two companies of Capt. Custer and Lieut. Smith retreated from the place where Gen. Custer was killed into the lower ravine, and were the last survivors of the conflict.

Near the highest point of the hill lay the body of General Custer, and near by were those of his brother Captain Custer, Lieut. Smith, Capt. Yates, Lieut. W. V. Riley of Yates' company, and Lieut. W.W. Cooke. Some distance away, close together, were found another brother of Gen. Custer—Boston Custer, a civilian, who had accompanied the expedition as forage master of the 7th Cavalry—and his nephew [Pg 37]
Armstrong Reed, a youth of nineteen, who was visiting the General at the time the expedition started, and accompanied it as a driver of the herd of cattle taken along. The wife of Lieut. Calhoun was a sister of the Custer's, and she here lost her husband, three brothers, and a nephew.

Other officers of Custer's battalion killed but not already mentioned, were Asst. Surgeon L.W. Lord, and Lieuts. H.M. Harrington, J.E. Porter, and J.G. Sturgis. The last named was a West Point graduate of 1875, and a son of General S.D. Sturgis, the Colonel of the 7th Cavalry, who had been detained by other duties when his regiment started on this expedition. The bodies of the slain were rifled of valuables and all were mutilated excepting Gen. Custer, and Mark Kellogg—a correspondent of the *New York Herald*. Gen. Custer was clad in a buckskin suit; and a Canadian—Mr. Macdonald—was subsequently informed by Indians who were in the fight, that for this reason he was not mangled, as they took him to be some brave hunter accidentally with the troops. Others believe that Custer was passed by from respect for the heroism of one whom the Indians had learned to fear and admire.

The dead were buried June 28th, where they fell, Major Reno and the survivors of his regiment performing the last sad rites over their comrades.

A retreat to the mouth of Big Horn River was now ordered and successfully effected, the wounded being comfortably transported on mule litters to the mouth of the Little Big Horn, where they were placed on a steamboat and taken to Fort Lincoln. Gibbon's Cavalry followed the Indians for about ten miles, and ascertained that they [Pg 38]
had moved to the south and west by several trails. A good deal of property had been thrown away by them to lighten their march, and was found scattered about. Many of their dead were also discovered secreted in ravines a long distance from the battle field.

At the boat was found one of Custer's scouts, who had been in the fight—a Crow named Curley; his story was as follows:—

> "Custer kept down the river on the north bank four miles, after Reno had crossed to the south side above. He thought Reno would drive down the valley, to attack the village at the upper end, while he (Custer) would go in at the lower end. Custer had to go further down the river and further away from Reno than he wished on account of the steep bank along the north side; but at last he found a ford and dashed for it. The Indians met him and poured in a heavy fire from across the narrow river. Custer

dismounted to fight on foot, but could not get his skirmishers over the stream. Meantime hundreds of Indians, on foot and on ponies, poured over the river, which was only about three feet deep, and filled the ravine on each side of Custer's men. Custer then fell back to some high ground behind him and seized the ravines in his immediate vicinity. The Indians completely surrounded Custer and poured in a terrible fire on all sides. They charged Custer on foot in vast numbers, but were again and again driven back.

"The fight began about 2 o'clock, and lasted almost until the sun went down over the hills. The men fought desperately, and after the ammunition in their belts was exhausted went to their saddlebags, got more and continued the fight. Custer lived until nearly all his men had been killed or wounded, and went about encouraging his soldiers to fight on. He got a shot in the left side and sat down, with his pistol in his hand. Another shot struck Custer in the breast, and he fell over. The last officer killed was a man who rode a white horse—believed to be Lieut. Cooke, as Cooke and Calhoun were the only officers who rode white horses.

"When he saw Custer hopelessly surrounded he watched his opportunity, got a Sioux blanket, put it on, and worked up a ravine, and when the Sioux charged, he got among them and they did not know him from one of their own men. There were some mounted Sioux, and seeing one fall, he ran to him, mounted his pony, and galloped down as if going towards the white men, but went up a ravine and got away. As he rode off he saw, when nearly a mile from the battle field, a dozen or more soldiers in a ravine, fighting with Sioux all around them. He thinks all were killed, as they were outnumbered five to one, and apparently dismounted. The battle was desperate in the extreme, and more Indians than white men must have been killed." [Pg 39]

The following extract is from a letter written to Gen. Sheridan by Gen. Terry at his camp on the Big Horn, July 2d:—

"We calculated it would take Gibbon's command until the 26th to reach the mouth of the Little Big Horn, and that the wide sweep I had proposed Custer should make would require so much time that Gibbon would be able to co-operate with him in attacking any Indians that might be found on the stream. I asked Custer how long his marches would be. He said they would be at the rate of about 30 miles a day. Measurements were made and calculations based on that rate of progress. I talked with him about his strength, and at one time suggested that perhaps it would be well for me to take Gibbon's cavalry and go with him. To the latter suggestion he replied:—that, without reference to the command, he would prefer his own regiment alone. As a homogeneous body, as much could be done with it as with the two combined. He expressed the utmost confidence that he had all the force that he could need, and I shared his confidence. The plan adopted was the only one which promised to bring the infantry into action, and I desired to make sure of things by getting up every available man. I offered Custer the battery of Gatling guns, but he declined it, saying that it might embarrass him, and that he was strong enough without it. The movements proposed by General Gibbon's column were carried out to the letter, and had the attack been deferred until it was up, I cannot doubt that we should have been successful."

CHAPTER VI.

RENO'S BATTLES ON THE LITTLE BIG HORN.

After the battle in which Lieut. Col. Custer lost his life, the command of the 7th Cavalry regiment devolved on Major Reno. The following is a copy of Reno's official report to Gen. Terry, excepting that a few unimportant paragraphs are omitted. It is dated July 5th, 1876.

"The regiment left the camp at the mouth of Rosebud River, after passing in review before the department commander, under command of Brevet Major General G.A. Custer, Lieutenant Colonel, on the afternoon of the 22d of June, and marched up the Rosebud 12 miles and encamped. 23d—Marched up the Rosebud, passing many old Indian camps, and following a very large lodge-pole trail, but not fresh, making 33 miles. 24th—The march was continued up the Rosebud, the trail and signs freshening with every mile until we had made 28 miles, and we then encamped and waited for information from the scouts. At 9.25 P.M., Custer called the officers together, and informed us that beyond a doubt the village was in the valley of the Little Big Horn, and that to reach it, it was necessary to cross the divide between the Rosebud and Little Big Horn, and it would be impossible to do so in the daytime without discovering our march to the Indians; that we would prepare to move at 11 P.M. This was done, the line of march turning from the Rosebud to the right, up one of its branches, which headed near the summit of the divide.

"About 2 A.M. of the 25th, the scouts told him that he could not cross the divide before daylight. We then made coffee and rested for three hours, at the expiration of which time the march was resumed, the divide crossed, and about 8 A.M. the command was in the valley of one of the branches of the Little Big Horn. By this time Indians had been seen, and it was certain that we could not surprise them, and it was determined to move at once to the attack. [Pg 41]

"Previous to this no division of the regiment had been made since the order was issued on the Yellowstone, annulling wing and battalion organizations. General Custer

informed me he would assign commands on the march. I was ordered by Lieut. W.W. Cooke, Adjutant, to assume command of Companies M, A, and G; Capt. Benteen of Companies H, D, and K; Custer retaining C, E, F, I, and L, under his immediate command; and Company B, Capt. McDougall, being in rear of the pack train. I assumed command of the companies assigned to me, and without any definite orders, moved forward with the rest of the column, and well to its left. I saw Benteen moving further to the left, and, as they passed, he told me he had orders to move well to the left, and sweep everything before him; I did not see him again until about 2:30 P.M. The command moved down the creek towards the Little Big Horn Valley. Custer with five companies on the right bank; myself and three companies on the left bank; and Benteen further to the left, and out of sight.

"As we approached a deserted village, in which was standing one tepee, about 11 A.M., Custer motioned me to cross to him, which I did, and moved nearer to his column, until about 12:30 A.M., when Lieut. Cooke came to me and said the village was only two miles ahead and running away. To 'move forward at as rapid a gait as I thought prudent and to charge afterward, and that the whole outfit would support me.' I think those were his exact words. I at once took a fast trot, and moved down about two miles, when I came to a ford of the river. I crossed immediately, and halted about ten minutes or less, to gather the battalion, sending word to Custer that I had everything in front of me, and that they were strong.

"I deployed, and, with the Ree scouts on my left, charged down the valley, driving the Indians with great ease for about 2½ miles. I, however, soon saw that I was being drawn into some trap, as they certainly would fight harder, and especially as we were nearing their village, which was still standing; besides, I could not see Custer or any other support; and at the same time the very earth seemed to grow Indians, and they were running toward me in swarms, and from all directions. I saw I must defend [Pg 42]
myself, and give up the attack mounted. This I did, taking possession of a point of woods, which furnished near its edge a shelter for the horses; dismounted, and fought them on foot, making headway through the woods. I soon found myself in the near vicinity of the village, saw that I was fighting odds of at least five to one, and that my only hope was to get out of the woods, where I would soon have been surrounded, and gain some high ground. I accomplished this by mounting and charging the Indians between me and the bluffs on the opposite side of the river. In this charge First Lieut. Donald McIntosh, Second Lieut. Benjamin H. Hodgson, and Acting Assistant Surgeon J. M. De Wolf were killed.

"I succeeded in reaching the top of the bluff, with a loss of the three officers and 29 enlisted men killed, and seven men wounded. Almost at the same time I reached the top, mounted men were seen to be coming toward us, and it proved to be Capt. Benteen's battalion, Companies H, D, and K; we joined forces, and in a short time the pack train came up. As senior my command was then Companies A, B, D, G, H, K, and M, about 380 men; and the following officers:—Captains Benteen, Weir, French, and McDougall, First Lieutenants Godfrey, Mathey, and Gibson, Second Lieutenants Edgerly, Wallace, Varnum, and Hare, and A.A. Surgeon Porter. First Lieut. De Rudio was in the dismounted fight in the woods, but having some trouble with his horse did not join the command in the charge out, and hiding himself in the woods, joined the command after nightfall of the 26th.

"Still hearing nothing of Custer, and with this reinforcement, I moved down the river in the direction of the village, keeping on the bluffs. We had heard firing in that direction, and knew it could only be Custer. I moved to the summit of the highest bluff, but seeing and hearing nothing, sent Capt. Weir, with his company, to open communication with the other command. He soon sent back word by Lieut. Hare that he could go no further, and that the Indians were getting around him. At this time he was keeping up a heavy fire from his skirmish line. I at once turned everything back to the first position I had taken on the bluff, and which seemed to me the best. I dismounted the men, had the horses and mules of the pack train driven together in a [Pg 43]
depression, put the men on the crests of the hills making the depression, and had hardly done so when I was furiously attacked. This was about 6 P.M. We held our ground, with the loss of 18 enlisted men killed and 46 wounded, until the attack ceased, about 9 P.M.

"As I knew by this time their overwhelming numbers, and had given up any support from the portion of the regiment with Custer, I had the men dig rifle-pits; barricaded with dead horses, mules, and boxes of hard bread, the opening of the depression toward the Indians in which the animals were herded; and made every exertion to be ready for what I saw would be a terrific assault the next day. All this night the men were busy, and the Indians holding a scalp dance underneath us in the bottom and in our hearing.

"On the morning of the 26th I felt confident that I could hold my own, and was ready as far as I could be, when at daylight, about 2:30 A.M., I heard the crack of two rifles. This was the signal for the beginning of a fire that I have never seen equaled. Every rifle was handled by an expert and skilled marksman, and with a range that exceeded our carbine; and it was simply impossible to show any part of the body, before it was struck. We could see, as the day brightened, countless hordes of them pouring up the valley from out the village, and scampering over the high points toward the places designated for them by their chiefs, and which entirely surrounded our position. They had sufficient numbers to completely encircle us, and men were struck on the opposite sides of the lines from which the shots were fired. I think we were fighting all the Sioux nation, and also all the desperados, renegades, half-breeds and squaw men, between the Missouri and the Arkansas and east of the Rocky Mountains. They must have numbered at least 2,500 warriors.

"The fire did not slacken until about 9:30 A.M., and then we discovered that they were making a last desperate attempt, which was directed against the lines held by Companies H and M. In this attack they charged close enough to use their bows and arrows, and one man lying dead within our lines was touched by the 'coup stick' of one of the foremost Indians. When I say the stick was only about 10 or 12 feet long, some idea of the desperate and reckless fighting of these people may be understood. This charge of theirs was gallantly repulsed by the men on that line led by Capt. [Pg 44] Benteen. They also came close enough to send their arrows into the line held by Companies D and K, but were driven away by a like charge of the line, which I accompanied. We now had many wounded, and the question of water was vital, as from 6 P.M. of the previous evening until now, 10 A.M. (about 16 hours) we had been without it. A skirmish line was formed under Capt. Benteen, to protect the descent of volunteers down the hill in front of his position to reach the water. We succeeded in getting some canteens, although many of the men were hit in doing so.

"The fury of the attack was now over, and to my astonishment the Indians were seen going in parties toward the village. But two solutions occurred to us for this movement—that they were going for something to eat, more ammunition (as they had been throwing arrows), or that Custer was coming. We took advantage of this lull to fill all vessels with water, and soon had it by the camp kettle full; but they continued to withdraw, and all firing ceased, save occasional shots from sharpshooters, sent to annoy us about the water. About 2 P.M. the grass in the bottom was set on fire, and followed up by Indians who encouraged its burning, and it was evident it was done for a purpose, which purpose I discovered, later on, to be the creation of a dense cloud of smoke, behind which they were packing and preparing to move their tepees.

"It was between 6 and 7 P.M. that the village came out from behind the clouds of smoke and dust. We had a close and good view of them, as they filed away in the direction of the Big Horn Mountains, moving in almost perfect military order. The length of the column was fully equal to that of a large division of the cavalry corps of the Army of the Potomac, as I have seen it on its march.

"We now thought of Custer, of whom nothing had been seen and nothing heard since the firing in his direction about 6 P.M. on the eve of the 25th, and we concluded that the Indians had gotten between him and us, and driven him toward the boat, at the mouth of Little Big Horn River; the awful fate that did befall him never occurring to any of us as within the limits of possibilities. During the night I changed my position, in order to secure an unlimited supply of water, and was prepared for their return, feeling sure they would do so, as they were in such numbers. But early in the morning [Pg 45] of the 27th, and while we were on the *qui vive* for Indians, I saw with my glass a dust some distance down the valley. There was no certainty for some time what they were, but finally I satisfied myself they were cavalry, and if so could only be Custer, as it was ahead of the time that I understood that General Terry could be expected. Before this time, however, I had written a communication to Gen. Terry, and three volunteers were to try and reach him (I had no confidence in the Indians with me, and could not get them to do anything). If this dust were Indians, it was possible they would not expect any one to leave. The men started, and were told to go as near as was safe to determine if the approaching column was white men, and to return at once in case they found it so; but if they were Indians to push on to General Terry. In a short time we saw them returning over the high bluff already alluded to; they were accompanied by a scout who had a note from Terry to Custer, saying, 'Crow scouts had come to camp saying he had been whipped, but it was not believed.' I think it was about 10:30 A.M. that General Terry rode into my lines, and the fate of Custer and his brave men was soon determined by Capt. Benteen proceeding with his company to the battle ground.

"The wounded in my lines were, during the afternoon and eve of the 27th, moved to the camp of General Terry; and at 5 A.M. of the 28th, I proceeded with the regiment to the battle ground of Custer, and buried 204 bodies, including the following named citizens:—Mr. Boston Custer, Mr. Reed, and Mr. Kellogg. The following named citizens and Indians, who were with my command, were also killed:—Charles Reynolds (guide and hunter); Isaiah (colored) interpreter; Bloody Knife (who fell from immediately by my side); Bob-tailed Bull and Stab of the Indian scouts.

"After following over his trail, it is evident to me that Custer intended to support me by moving further down the stream, and attacking the village in flank; that he found the distance to the ford greater than he anticipated; that he did charge, but his march had taken so long, although his trail shows he moved rapidly, that they were ready for him; that Companies C and I, and perhaps part of Company E, crossed to the village or attempted it at the charge and were met by a staggering fire; and that they fell back to secure a position from which to defend themselves; but they were followed too [Pg 46] closely by the Indians to permit him to form any kind of a line. I think had the regiment gone in as a body, and from the woods in which I fought advanced on the village, its destruction was certain; but he was fully confident they were running, or he would not have turned from me. I think (after the great number of Indians that were in the village) that the following reasons obtained for the misfortune: His rapid marching for two days and one night before the fight, attacking in the day time at 12 M. and when they were on the *qui vive*, instead of early in the morning; and lastly, his unfortunate division of the regiment into three commands.

"During my fight with the Indians I had the heartiest support from officers and men, but the conspicuous services of Brevet Colonel F.W. Benteen, I desire to call attention to especially, for if ever a soldier deserved recognition by his government for distinguished services, he certainly does.

"The harrowing sight of the dead bodies crowning the height on which Custer fell, and

which will remain vividly in my memory until death, is too recent for me not to ask the good people of this country whether a policy that sets opposing parties in the field, armed, clothed, and equipped by one and the same government, should not be abolished. All of which is respectfully submitted."

The following is Capt. Benteen's account of his detour to the south and junction with Reno:—

"I was sent with my battalion to the left to a line of bluffs about five miles off, with instructions to look for Indians and see what was to be seen, and if I saw nothing there to go on, and when I had satisfied myself that it was useless to go further in that direction to rejoin the main trail. After proceeding through a rough and difficult country, very tiring on the horses, and seeing nothing, and wishing to save the horses unnecessary fatigue, I decided to return to the main trail. Before I had proceeded a mile in the direction of the bluffs I was overtaken by the chief trumpeter and the sergeant major, with instructions from Gen. Custer to use my own discretion, and in case I should find any trace of Indians, at once to notify Gen. Custer.

"Having marched rapidly and passed the line of bluffs on the left bank of a branch of the Little Big Horn which made into the main stream about two and a half miles above the ford crossed by Col. Reno's command, as ordered, I continued my march in the [Pg 47] same direction. The whole time occupied in this march was about an hour and a half. As I was anxious to regain the main command, as there was no signs of Indians, I then decided to rejoin the main trail, as the country before me was mostly of the same character as that I had already passed over, without valley and without water, and offering no inducement for the Indians. No valleys were visible, not even the valley where the fight took place, until my command struck the river.

"About three miles from the point where Reno crossed the ford, I met a sergeant bringing orders to the commanding officer of the rear guard, Capt. McDougall, to hurry up the pack trains. A mile further I was met by my trumpeter, bringing a written order from Lieut. Cooke, the adjutant of the regiment, to this effect:—'Benteen, come on; big village; be quick; bring packs:' and a postscript saying, 'Bring packs.' A mile or a mile and a half further on I first came in sight of the valley and Little Big Horn. About twelve or fifteen dismounted men were fighting on the plains with Indians, charging and recharging them. This body numbered about 900 at this time. Col. Reno's mounted party were retiring across the river to the bluffs. I did not recognize till later what part of the command this was, but was clear they had been beaten. I then marched my command in line to their succor.

"On reaching the bluff I reported to Col. Reno, and first learned that the command had been separated and that Custer was not in that part of the field, and no one of Reno's command was able to inform me of the whereabouts of Gen. Custer. While the command was awaiting the arrival of the pack mules, a company was sent forward in the direction supposed to have been taken by Custer. After proceeding about a mile they were attacked and driven back. During this time I heard no heavy firing, and there was nothing to indicate that a heavy fight was going on, and I believe that at this time Custer's immediate command had been annihilated."

In a letter addressed to the *Army and Navy Journal*, Lieut. E.L. Godfry, of Benteen's battalion, gives the following information:—

"Captain Benteen was some six miles from the scene of action when he received Lieut. Cooke's note; he had no intimation that the battle had begun, of the force of the [Pg 48] Indians, or plan of attack. Benteen pushed ahead; the packs followed, and not until he reached the high bluffs over-looking the river valley and near to where the troops afterwards were besieged did he know of the battle or immediate presence of the troops to the enemy; he could only hear occasional shots, not enough to intimate that a battle was going on. Soon after reaching this point two volleys were heard down the river where Gen. Custer was, but his force was not in sight. Soon after this Reno and Benteen joined. By accident Benteen's column constituted a reserve. It was well it was so. As soon as dispositions were made on the bluff, Weir's company was sent to look for Gen. Custer. He went to a high point about three-quarters of a mile down the river, from which he had a good view of the country. From it could be seen Custer's battle field, but there was nothing to indicate the result. The field was covered with Indians. He was recalled from the place; the packs closed up; ammunition was issued and the command moved down the river to, if possible, join Custer. Upon reaching this high point we could see nothing, hear nothing, to indicate Custer's vicinage. But immediately the Indians started for us."

The following is the narrative of George Herndon, a scout, published in the *New York Herald*:—

"At 11 P.M., June 24th, Custer followed the scouts up the right-hand fork of the Rosebud. About daylight we went into camp, made coffee, and soon after it was light the scouts brought Custer word that they had seen the village from the top of a divide that separates the Rosebud from Little Big Horn River. We moved up the creek until near its head, and concealed ourselves in a ravine. It was about three miles from the head of the creek where we then were to the top of the divide where the Indian scouts said the village could be seen, and after hiding his command, General Custer with a few orderlies galloped forward to look at the Indian camp. In about an hour he returned, and said he could not see the Indian village, but the scouts and a half-breed guide said they could distinctly see it some 15 miles off. Custer had 'officers' call' blown, gave his orders, and the command was put in fighting order. The scouts were ordered forward, and the regiment moved at a walk. After going about three miles the [Pg 49]

scouts reported Indians ahead, and the command then took the trail.

"Our way lay down a little creek, a branch of the Little Big Horn, and after going some six miles we discovered an Indian lodge ahead and Custer bore down on it at a stiff trot. In coming to it we found ourselves in a freshly-abandoned Indian camp, all the lodges of which were gone except the one we saw, and on entering it we found it contained a dead Indian. From this point we could see into the Little Big Horn valley, and observed heavy clouds of dust rising about five miles distant. Many thought the Indians were moving away, and I think Custer believed so, for he sent word to Reno, who was ahead, to push on the scouts rapidly and head for the dust. Reno took a steady gallop down the creek bottom three miles to where it emptied into the Little Big Horn, and found a natural ford across Little Big Horn River. He started to cross, when the scouts came back and called out to him to hold on, that the Sioux were coming in large numbers to meet him. He crossed over, however, formed his companies on the prairie in line of battle, and moved forward at a trot, but soon took a gallop.

"The valley was about three-fourths of a mile wide. On the left a line of low, round hills, and on the right the river bottom, covered with a growth of cottonwood trees and bushes. After scattering shots were fired from the hills and a few from the river bottom, and Reno's skirmishers had returned the shots, he advanced about a mile from the ford, to a line of timber on the right, and dismounted his men to fight on foot. The horses were sent into the timber, and the men formed on the prairies and advanced toward the Indians. The Indians, mounted on ponies, came across the prairies and opened a heavy fire on the soldiers. After skirmishing for a few minutes Reno fell back to his horses in the timber. The Indians moved to his left and rear, evidently with the intention of cutting him off from the ford. Reno ordered his men to mount and move through the timber. Just as the men got into the saddle the Sioux, who had advanced in the timber, fired at close range and killed one soldier. Reno then commanded the men to dismount, and they did so; but he soon ordered them to mount again and moved out on the open prairie. The command headed for the ford, pressed closely by Indians in large numbers, and at every moment the rate of speed was [Pg 50] increased, until it became a dead run for the ford. The Sioux, mounted on their swift ponies, dashed up by the side of the soldiers and fired at them, killing both men and horses. Little resistance was offered, and it was a complete route to the ford.

"I did not see the men at the ford, and do not know what took place further than a good many were killed when the command left the timber. Just as I got out my horse stumbled and fell, and I was dismounted—the horse running away after Reno's command. I saw several soldiers who were dismounted, their horses having been killed or having run away. There were also some soldiers mounted who had remained behind. In all there was as many as 13 men, three of whom were wounded. Seeing no chance to get away, I called on them to come into the timber and we would stand off the Indians. They wanted to go out, but I said 'No, we can't get to the ford, and, besides, we have wounded men and must stand by them.' They still wanted to go, but I told them I was an old frontiersman, understood Indians, and, if they would do as I said, I would get them out of the scrape, which was no worse than scrapes I had been in before. About half of the men were mounted, and they wanted to keep their horses with them; but I told them to let them go, and fight on foot. We stayed in the bush about three hours, and I could hear heavy firing below in the river, apparently about two miles distant. I did not know who it was, but knew the Indians were fighting some of our men, and learned afterward it was Custer's command. Nearly all the Indians in the upper end of the valley drew off down the river, and the fight with Custer lasted about one hour, when the heavy firing ceased.

"When the shooting below began to die away I said to the boys, 'Come, now is the time to get out; the Indians will come back, and we had better be off at once.' Eleven of the 13 said they would go, but two staid behind. I deployed the men as skirmishers, and we moved forward on foot toward the river. When we had got nearly to the river we met five Indians on ponies, and they fired on us. I returned the fire and the Indians broke, and we forded the river, the water being breast-deep. We finally got over, wounded men and all, and headed for Reno's command, which I could see drawn up on the bluffs along the river about a mile off. We reached Reno in safety. We had not been with Reno more than 15 minutes when I saw the Indians coming up the valley [Pg 51] from Custer's fight. Reno was then moving his whole command down the ridge toward Custer. The Indians crossed the river below Reno and swarmed up the bluff on all sides. After skirmishing with them Reno went back to his old position which was on one of the highest points along the bluffs. It was now about 5 P.M., and the fight lasted until it was too dark to see to shoot. As soon as it was dark, Reno took the packs and saddles off the mules and horses and made breastworks of them. He also dragged the dead horses and mules on the line and sheltered the men behind them. Some of the men dug rifle pits with their butcher knives and all slept on their arms.

"At the peep of day the Indians opened a heavy fire and a desperate fight ensued, lasting until 10 A.M. The Indians charged our position three or four times, coming up close enough to hit our men with stones, which they threw by hand. Captain Benteen saw a large mass of Indians gathering on his front to charge, and ordered his men to charge on foot and scatter them. Benteen led the charge, and was upon the Indians before they knew what they were about and killed a great many. They were evidently surprised at this offensive movement. I think in desperate fighting Benteen is one of the bravest men I ever saw. All the time he was going about through the bullets, encouraging the soldiers to stand up to their work and not let the Indians whip them. He never sheltered his own person once during the battle, and I do not see how he escaped being killed. The desperate charging and fighting was at about 1 P.M., but firing was kept up on both sides until late in the afternoon.

"I think the Indian village must have contained about 6,000 people, fully 3,000 of whom were warriors. The Indians fought Reno first and then went to fight Custer, after which they came back to finish Reno. Hordes of squaws and old, gray-haired Indians were roaming over the battle-field howling like mad. The squaws had stone mallets, and mashed in the skulls of the dead and wounded. Our men did not kill any squaws, but the Ree Indian scouts did. The bodies of six squaws were found in the little ravine. The Indians must have lost as many men in killed and wounded as the whites did."

CHAPTER VII.

KILL EAGLE'S NARRATIVE.

A vivid account of Custer's last battle has been given by an Indian named Kill Eagle, who was in Sitting Bull's village on the day of the fight as, he claims, a non-combatant. Kill Eagle was head chief of the Cheyenne River Agency Indians who had become much dissatisfied. Capt. Poland, formerly commander of the troops at Standing Rock, says that the Indians there were "abominably starved during the winter and spring of 1875—the authorities having failed to deliver the rations due them; and in May and June 1876, the Indians received practically nothing except two issues of beef and ground corn, called meal, but so coarse that one peck yielded but a quart of meal."

Early in May, Kill Eagle entered the military post with a party of warriors, gave a dance, demanded rations, and proclaimed "that he owned the land the post was built on, the timber and stone which had been used in its construction, and that he would have the Great Father pay for all these things; that his people were starving and they could get no food from the agent." The post commander told them he could do nothing for them. Kill Eagle's party manifested sulliness, and demonstrated their defiance by firing off pistols in the air as they marched outside of the garrison. A few days later the post commander was informed that Kill Eagle had started for the hostile camp with about thirty lodges. [Pg 53]

In September, Kill Eagle came near the post and sent word that he intended to kill all the soldiers unless they crossed the river. The troops were under arms all night anticipating an attack, but none was made. Subsequently Kill Eagle surrendered to the authorities, and gave them an account of his wanderings during the summer. A letter written at Standing Rock described his story as follows:—

"He commences with the date at which he left this agency, last spring, with 26 lodges, for the purpose of hunting buffalo and trading with the hostile Indians. He speaks of having heard reports that troops were going out to punish the hostiles, but thought he would have time to do his hunting and trading and get out of the way before a battle occurred. They were obliged to hunt, as they were starving at the agency, and were very successful.

"On the seventh day they arrived at Sitting Bull's village, where a feast and numerous presents of ponies and robes were given them. Efforts were made to induce Kill Eagle and his band to join in the contemplated movements and hostilities, but evidently without much success. They were desirous of getting back again to the protecting arms of their agency, but were unable to escape from the meshes of the wily Sitting Bull. They found, too late, that for them there was no escape; their horses were either shot or stolen, and wounds and insults were showered upon them from every side. In the meantime the forces of Crook were approaching, and with his people Kill Eagle succeeded in escaping temporarily from the hostiles. He claims to have been distant some forty or fifty miles from the scene of the Rosebud fight, and relates many of the incidents which he was able subsequently to gather from the participants. He places the loss of the Indians in the Rosebud fight at four dead, left on the field, and twelve that were brought to camp. He places the wounded at as high as 400, and says they had 180 horses killed, besides those that were captured. [Pg 54]

"He next comes to the fight on the Little Big Horn, and describes the Indian village, which was six miles long and one wide. He then speaks of Custer's approach and fight with its tragic details as an unwilling spectator, rather than a participant, who, during its progress, remained quietly in his lodge in the centre of the Indian village. The fight with Reno commenced about noon, the Indians all rushing to oppose his advance, until the approach of Custer toward the lower end of the village was announced, when the wildest confusion prevailed throughout the camp. Lodges were struck and preparations made for instant flight. Vast numbers of Indians left Reno's front and hastened to the assistance of their red brethren engaged with Custer, who was steadily forced back and surrounded until all were swept from the field by the repeated charges of the Indians.

"He described the firing at this point as simply terrific, and illustrated its force by clapping his hands together with great rapidity and regularity. Then came a lull in the fearful storm of iron hail and his hands were still again. The storm beat fast and furious as the thought of some loved one nerved the arm of each contending trooper. Then the movement of his hands slackened and gradually grew more feeble. A few scattering shakes, like the rain upon a window pane, and then the movement ceased as the last of Custer's band of heroes went down with the setting sun.

"It was dusk as the successful combatants returned to camp littered with their dead and wounded. 'We have killed them all,' they said, 'put up your lodges where they are.' They had just began to fix their lodges that evening, when a report came that troops were coming from toward the mouth of the creek. When this report came, after dark, the lodges were all taken down and they started up the creek. 'I told my men,' says Kill Eagle, 'to keep together, and we would try and get away. Some one told on me, and they said let us kill him and his band, we have lost many young men to-day, and our hearts are bad. We travelled all night and next day; after crossing the Greasy Grass we encamped near the foot of the White Mountains. That night, when I was asleep, I heard a man calling. I woke up my people and this man proved to be a Cheyenne Indian, belonging to a party that had been off on the war-path in the White Mountains.' [Pg 55]

"It was not to the Indians a bloodless victory. Fourteen had fallen in front of Reno, thirty-nine went down with Custer, and fourteen were dead in camp. Horses and travoises were laden with their wounded on every hand and in countless numbers. One band alone of Ogallallas had twenty-seven wounded on travoises, and thirty-eight thrown across horses. There were no white men in the fight or on the field. The bugle calls were sounded by an Indian. No prisoners were taken. The troops were all killed on the east side; none crossed the river."

Little Buck-Elk, an Uncapapa chief who came into Fort Peck in September, said that he was present at the fight with Custer, and that eleven different tribes were engaged in it. "The Indians were as thick as bees at the fight, and there were so many of them that they could not all take part in it. The soldiers were all brave men and fought well; some of them, when they found themselves surrounded and overpowered, broke through the lines and tried to make their escape, but were pursued and killed miles from the battle ground. The Indians captured six battle flags. No soldiers were taken alive, but after the fight the women went among the dead bodies and robbed and mutilated them. There were plenty of watches and money taken, which the young warriors are wearing in their shirts and belts."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ATTACK IN THE REAR.

Major Reno's conduct on the first day of the fighting on the Little Big Horn, has been severely criticised by several of Gen. Custer's personal friends; and one of them, Gen T.L. Rosser, in a letter addressed to Reno and published in the *Army and Navy Journal*, blames him for taking to the timber when his "loss was little or nothing." "You had," he says, "an open field for cavalry operations, and I believe that if you had remained in the saddle and charged boldly into the village, the shock upon the Indians would have been so great that they would have been compelled to withdraw their attacking force from Custer, who, when relieved, could have pushed his command through to open ground, where he could have manœuvred his command, and thus greatly have increased his chances of success." It would seem as if this and similar criticisms were sufficiently answered by Reno's report; and by his reply to Rosser, which is given in part below:—

"After reading all your letter I could no longer look upon it as a tribute of a generous enemy, since through me you had attacked as brave officers as ever served a government, and with the same recklessness and ignorance of circumstances as Custer is charged with in his attacks upon the hostile Indians. Both charges—the one made against him and the one made by you against us—are equally untrue, You say: —'I feel Custer would have succeeded had Reno, with all the reserve of seven companies, passed through and joined Custer after the first repulse;' and after [Pg 57] confessing that you are firing at long range say further: 'I think it quite certain that Custer had agreed with Reno upon a place of junction in case of the repulse of either or both detachments; and, instead of an effort being made by Reno for such a junction, as soon as he encountered heavy resistance he took refuge in the hills and abandoned Custer and his gallant comrades to their fate.

"As I shall show, both the premises are false, and consequently all the conclusions of your letter fall to the ground. * * * The only official orders I had from Custer were about five miles from the village, when Cooke gave me his orders in these words: 'Custer says to move at as rapid a gait as you think prudent, and to charge afterwards, and you will be supported by the whole outfit.'

"No mention of any plan, no thought of junction, only the usual orders to the advance guard to attack by the charge. When the enemy was reached I moved to the front at a fast trot, and at the river halted ten minutes or less to gather the battalion. I sent word to Custer that I had the enemy in my front very strong, and then charged, driving the reds before me about three miles or less, to within a short distance of their village, supposing my command, consisting of 120 officers and men and about 25 scouts and guards, followed by the columns under Custer. The stream was very crooked, like a letter S in its wanderings, and on the side on which the village was it opened out into a broad bottom, perhaps half or three-quarters of a mile wide. The stream was fringed, as usual, with the trees of the plains—a growth of large cottonwood, and on the opposite side was a range of high bluffs which had been cut

into very deep ravines.

"As I neared the village the Indians came out in great numbers, and I was soon convinced I had at least ten to one against me, and was forced on the defensive. This I accomplished by taking possession of a point of woods where I found shelter for my horses. I fought there dismounted, and made my way to within 200 yards of the village, and firmly believe that if, at that moment, the seven companies had been together the Indians could have been driven from their village. As we approached near their village they came out in overwhelming numbers, and soon the small command would have been surrounded on all sides, to prevent which I mounted and charged through them to a position I could hold with the few men I had.

"You see by this I was the advance and the first to be engaged and draw fire, and was consequently the command to be supported, and not the one from which support could be expected. All I know of Custer from the time he ordered me to attack till I saw him buried, is that he did not follow my trail, but kept on his side of the river and along the crest of the bluffs on the opposite side from the village and from my command; that he heard and saw my action I believe, although I could not see him; and it is just here that the Indians deceived us. All this time I was driving them with ease, and his trail shows he moved rapidly down the river for three miles to the ford, at which he attempted to cross into their village, and with the conviction that he would strike a a retreating enemy. Trumpeter Martin, of Co. H, who the last time of any living person heard and saw Gen. Custer, and who brought the last order his adjutant ever penciled, says he left the General at the summit of the highest bluff on that side, and which overlooked the village and my first battle-field, and as he turned, Gen. Custer raised his hat and gave a yell, saying they were asleep in their tepees and surprised, and to charge. * * * [Pg 58]

"The Indians made him over confident by appearing to be stampeded, and, undoubtedly, when he arrived at the ford, expecting to go with ease through their village, he rode into an ambuscade of at least 2,000 reds. My getting the command of the seven companies was not the result of any order or prearranged plan. Benteen and McDougal arrived separately, and saw the command on the bluffs and came to it. They did not go into the bottom at all after the junction. They attempted to go down the trail of Gen. Custer, but the advance company soon sent back word they were being surrounded. Crowds of reds were seen on all sides of us, and Custer's fate had evidently been determined. I knew the position I had first taken on the bluff was near and a strong one. I at once moved there, dismounted, and herded the pack train, and had but just time to do so when they came upon me by thousands. Had we been twenty minutes later effecting the junction not a man of that regiment would be living to-day to tell the tale."

Another writer attacks both Reno and Benteen, accusing one of incapacity and utter demoralization during the attack of the Indians, and the other of wilful disobedience. "That he (Benteen) should have, as his own testimony confesses, deliberately disobeyed the *peremptory order of Custer* to 'Come on,' argues either a desire to sacrifice Custer, or an ignorance of which his past career renders him incapable. Custer told him to 'Come on,' and he reported to Reno." In order, as he says, to "vindicate the reputation of a noble man from unjust aspersions," this writer further declares, that "had Reno fought as Custer fought, and had Benteen obeyed Custer's orders, the battle of the Little Big Horn might have proved Custer's last and greatest Indian victory." [Pg 59]

Of the writer last quoted, the *Army and Navy Journal* says:—"With reckless pen he thrusts right and left, careless of reputations, regardless of facts, darkening the lives of other men, in the vain hope that one name may shine more brightly on the page of history * * * Nothing but the most absolute demonstration, accompanied by the proof, would justify such statements as he has made, and this he has not given. The reports of anonymous newspaper correspondents, and an *ex parte* statement of the conclusions drawn from letters, of which we have not so much as the names of the writers, is not proof on which to base criticisms affecting character and reputation."

Capt. Benteen, Brevet Colonel U.S.A., who has been a captain in the 7th Cavalry since its organization in 1866, at which date Gen. Custer was appointed its Lieut. Colonel, in a letter to the *Army and Navy Journal* uses the following language:—

"Col. Reno and I thought during the siege of June 25th and 26th, at the Little Big Horn, that he, Reno, was the abandoned party, and spoke of it as another 'Major Elliot[B] affair'; thinking that General Custer had retreated to the mouth of the river, where the steamboat was supposed to be, and that Reno's command was left to *its* fate. I am accused of disobeying Custer's orders. Nothing is further from the truth in point of fact; and I do not think the matter of sufficient importance to attempt to vindicate myself, but can rest contentedly under the ban when I have the consoling belief that the contrary is so well known by all my military superiors and comrades." [Pg 60]

Lieut. Gen. Sheridan, in his report for 1876, expresses his views of the Custer disaster as follows:—

"As much has been said in regard to the misfortune that occurred to General Custer and the portion of his regiment under his immediate command in this action, I wish to express the conviction I have arrived at concerning it. From all the information that has reached me, I am led to believe that the Indians were not aware of the proximity

of Custer until he had arrived within about eight or nine miles of their village, and that then their scouts who carried the intelligence back to the valley were so closely followed up by Custer, that he arrived on the summit of the divide overlooking the upper portion of the village, almost as soon as the scouts reached it. As soon as the news was given, the Indians began to strike their lodges and get their women and children out of the way—a movement they always make under such circumstances. Custer, seeing this, believed the village would escape him if he awaited the arrival of the four companies of his regiment—still some miles in his rear. Only about 75 or 100 lodges or tepees could be seen from the summit or divide, and this, probably, deceived him as to the extent of the village. He therefore directed Major Reno, with three companies, to cross the river and charge the village, while he, with the remaining five companies, would gallop down the east bank of the river behind the bluff and cut off the retreat of the Indians. Reno crossed and attacked gallantly with his three companies—about 110 men—but the warriors, leaving the women to strike the lodges, fell on Reno's handful of men and drove them back to and over the river with severe loss.

"About this time Custer reached a point about three and a half or four miles down the river, but instead of finding a village of 75 or 100 lodges, he found one of perhaps from 1500 to 2000, and swarming with warriors, who brought him to a halt. This, I think, was the first intimation the Indians had of Custer's approach to cut them off, for they at once left Reno and concentrated to meet the new danger. The point where Custer reached the river, on the opposite side of which was the village, was broken into choppy ravines, and the Indians, crossing from Reno, got between the two commands, and as Custer could not return, he fell back over the broken ground with his tired men and tired horses (they had ridden about 70 miles with but few halts) and became, I am afraid, an easy prey to the enemy. Their wild, savage yells, overwhelming numbers, and frightening war paraphernalia, made it as much as each trooper could do to take care of his horse, thus endangering his own safety and efficiency. If Custer could have reached any position susceptible of defence, he could have defended himself; but none offered itself in the choppy and broken ravines over which he had to pass, and he and his command were lost without leaving any one to tell the tale. [Pg 61]

"As soon as Custer and his gallant officers and men were exterminated and the scenes of mutilation by the squaws commenced, the warriors returned to renew the attack upon Reno; but he had been joined by Captain Benteen and the four companies of the regiment that were behind when the original attack took place, and the best use had been made of the respite given by the attack on Custer, to entrench their position.

"Had the 7th Cavalry been kept together, it is my belief it would have been able to handle the Indians on the Little Big Horn, and under any circumstances it could have at least defended itself; but separated as it was into three distinct detachments, the Indians had largely the advantage in addition to their overwhelming numbers. If Custer had not come upon the village so suddenly, the warriors would have gone to meet him, in order to give time to the women and children to get out of the way, as they did with Crook only a few days before, and there would have been, as with Crook, what might be designated a rearguard fight—a fight to get their valuables out of the way, or in other words, to cover the escape of their women, children and lodges."

CHAPTER IX.

THE MIDSUMMER CAMPAIGN.

After regaining his position at the mouth of the Big Horn River, Gen. Terry called for reinforcements and additional troops were at once put in motion for his camp; but as they had to be collected from all the various stations on the frontier—some of them very remote from railroads—considerable time elapsed before their arrival.

During this period, the bands which had broken off from the main body of hostiles, and the young men at the agencies, continued their old and well-known methods of warfare, stealing horses on the frontier and killing small parties of citizens; while the constant communication by the hostiles with the Indians at the agencies made it evident that supplies of food and ammunition were being received. To prevent this, Gen. Sheridan deemed it necessary that the military should control the agencies, and at his request, the Secretary of the Interior, July 22d, authorized the military to assume control of all the agencies in the Sioux country.

About the same date Medicine Cloud, a chief, who had been sent from Fort Peck, in May, with a message to Sitting Bull inviting him to visit Fort Peck with a view to reconciliation, returned to the agency. To the invitation, Sitting Bull had replied:— [Pg 63]

"Tell him I am coming before long to his post to trade. Tell him I did not commence. I am getting old, and I did not want to fight, but the whites rush on me, and I am compelled to defend myself. But for the soldiers stationed on the Rosebud, I with my people would have been there before that. If I was assured of the protection of the Great Father, I would go to Fort Peck for the purpose of making peace. I and others want the Black Hills abandoned, and we will make peace."

While awaiting reinforcements, Generals Terry and Crook were separated by about

100 miles of rough territory, the hostile Indians were between them, and for reliable communication with each other it was necessary to send around by the rear nearly 2000 miles. The carrying of dispatches direct was a work of the most arduous and perilous nature, and in doing it, and in reconnoitering, brave and gallant deeds were performed.

On the 6th of July, Gen. Crook sent out Lieut. Sibley of the 2nd Cavalry with 25 mounted troops and two guides, Gerard and Baptiste, to reconnoiter the country to the front, and learn if possible the movements of the enemy and the whereabouts of Terry's division. The party marched all night, and in the morning were near where the Little Big Horn debouches from the mountains. Here, from an eminence, they espied a large body of Indians marching eastward as though meditating an attack on the camp at Goose Creek. Concealing themselves as well as they could, they watched the movements of the enemy; but a great shout soon warned them that their trail had been discovered, and hundreds of savages immediately set out to follow it, uttering terrific cries. [Pg 64]

The fugitives galloped toward the mountains, and seemed to outrun their pursuers; but about noon, while going through a ravine, a sudden volley was fired upon them from the surrounding slopes, and many Indians charged down upon them. They wheeled, and took refuge in the woods, but three horses were already wounded. Taking the ammunition from the saddles, and leaving their horses tied to the trees to divert the enemy, they now moved stealthily and unseen from the ground, and escaped behind adjacent rocks; then they climbed over steep and slippery places till exhausted, and while halting for a rest knew by the repeated firing that their horses were undergoing an attack.

All that night they toiled among the mountains, and on the morning of the 9th reached Tongue River. As they had left their rations behind, they suffered much from hunger, and two of the men were so weak they could not ford the deep stream, and remained behind. When near the camp one of the guides went ahead for assistance, and a company of cavalry brought in the exhausted men.

Having urgent occasion to communicate with Gen. Crook, Gen. Terry, by the promise of a large reward, induced a professional scout to make an attempt to reach him, but he soon returned unsuccessful. No other scout would undertake the task, and as a last resort a call for volunteers was made, in response to which, 12 soldiers promptly offered their services for the hazardous duty without hope of pecuniary reward. Three of these, Privates Wm. Evans, Benjamin F. Stewart, and Joseph Bell, of the 17th Infantry, were selected. They set out on the 9th of July, reached Crook's camp on the 12th; and returned on the 25th accompanied by three Crow Indians who had [Pg 65] arrived from Terry's camp on the 19th. The three soldiers were thanked by their commander, in a General Order, "for a deed reflecting so much credit on the Service."

Partial reinforcements having reached Gen. Crook, on the 16th of July he broke camp and moved gradually along the hills toward Tongue River. On the 3d of August, just before sunset, an additional regiment, the 5th Cavalry, ten companies, under Col. W. Merritt, "marched into camp with their supply wagons close on their heels, presenting a fine appearance, despite the fatigue and dust of the march."

Gen. Crook's fighting force now numbered about 2000 men. Among them were over 200 Shoshone and Ute Indians, sworn enemies to the Sioux, led by Washakie, a well known Shoshone chief. These Indians were thus spoken of by a correspondent who saw them at Fort Bridger, drawn up in line before starting to join Gen. Crook:—

> "In advance of the party was a swarthy temporary chief, his face covered with vertical white streaks. In his right hand, hanging to the end of a window-blind rod, were the two fingers of a dead Sioux. Another rod had a white flag nailed to it—a precaution necessary to preserve them from being fired upon in proceeding to the seat of war. The faces of the rest had on a plentiful supply of war paint. Once in line, they struck up a peculiar grunting sound on a scale of about five notes. One of the braves, afflicted with a malady peculiar to the Caucasian race, began to brag what he'd do when he got to the seat of war, winding up in broken English, 'Me little mad now; bime by me heap mad.' Old Washakie, their chief, wants to die in battle, and not in bed."

On the 5th of Aug., Gen. Crook cut loose from his wagon trains and started in pursuit of the Indians who, it was ascertained, had left the foot of the Big Horn Mountains, July 25th, and moved eastward. His route was north-easterly, across the Panther [Pg 66] Mountains to Rosebud River. On the 8th of Aug. the troops were ten miles north of the battle-ground of June 17th, and near the site of a deserted village. The country west of the Rosebud had been burned over, and a trail recently traveled by large numbers of Indians led down the valley. Upon this trail the march was continued.

Meantime, Gen. Terry had been reinforced by six companies of the 5th Infantry under Col. Nelson A. Miles, six companies of the 22d Infantry under Lt. Col. Otis, and other detachments, until his command numbered about the same as Gen. Crook's. On the 25th of July, he started for the mouth of the Rosebud and there established a

base of operations. On the 8th of Aug., with his troops and a train of 225 wagons with supplies for 30 days, he moved down the west bank of the Rosebud; and on the 10th, when 35 miles from its mouth, made a junction with Crook's command. Col. Miles with the 5th Infantry was sent back to the mouth of the Rosebud to patrol the Yellowstone, aided by steamboats, and intercept the Indians should they attempt to cross the river.

The trail which Gen. Crook had been following now turned from the Rosebud eastward, and its pursuit was promptly and steadily continued by the united forces. It led the troops across to Powder River and down its valley. On the 17th of August they were encamped near the mouth of Powder River, on both sides of the stream; and here the two commands separated on the 24th of August.

As the principal Indian trail had turned eastward toward the Little Missouri, Gen. Crook's column took up the pursuit in that direction. On the 5th of Sept, when on the headwaters of Heart River, a small party of Indians were discovered going eastward, [Pg 67] —the first hostile Indians seen since leaving Tongue River.

The trail had now scattered so that it could be followed no longer, and Crook decided to push for the Black Hills settlements. His troops were nearly out of food, and suffering from want of clothing, and bad weather. Cold rains prevailed, and camp life with no tents, few blankets, and half rations, bore hard on the soldiers. Meat was scarce and some of the horses were killed to supply food.

On the 7th of Sept., Capt. Anson Mills with 150 men and a pack-train, was sent ahead with directions to obtain food at the Black Hills settlements about 100 miles distant, and to return to the hungry column as soon as possible. Gerard, the scout, accompanied the detachment, and on the evening of the 8th, he discovered a hostile village of 40 lodges and several hundred ponies. Capt. Mills retreated a few miles, hid his men in a ravine, and at daybreak next morning dashed into the village. The Indians were completely surprised and fled to the surrounding hills, from which they exchanged shots with their assailants. The lodges were secured, with their contents consisting of large quantities of dried meat and other food, robes, and flags and clothing taken from Custer and his men. 140 ponies were also among the spoils.

A small party of the Indians had taken possession of a narrow ravine or canyon near the village, and in trying to dislodge them several soldiers were wounded. By direction of Gen. Crook, who had reached the field with reinforcements, the Indians in the ravine were informed that if they would surrender they would not be harmed. An old squaw was the first to take advantage of the offer, and was followed by 15 [Pg 68] women and children, and, lastly, by three warriors, one of whom, the chief American Horse, had been mortally wounded.

Later in the day, before the troops had left the village, the Indians appeared in force and began a vigorous attack. Infantry were at once thrown out along the slope of the bluffs and, "about sundown it was a very inspiring sight to see this branch of the command with their long Springfield breech-loaders drive the enemy for a mile and a half to the west, and behind the castellated rocks." The captives in camp said the attacking Indians were reinforcements from the camp of Crazy Horse further west. This engagement is known as the battle of Slim Buttes. Our losses during the day were three killed, and 11 wounded including Lieut. Von Leuttroitz.

During the march of Sept. 10th a number of Indians came down on the rear, but were repulsed with a loss of several killed and wounded. Three soldiers were wounded in this skirmish.

The remainder of this long and difficult march was successfully accomplished. On the 16th, Gen. Crook reached Deadwood, a Black Hills settlement, and was cordially received by the inhabitants. In a speech made by the General on this occasion, he said:—

> "Citizens: while you welcome me and my personal staff as the representatives of the soldiers who are here encamped upon the Whitewood, let me ask you, when the rank and file pass through here, to show that you appreciate their admirable fortitude in bearing the sufferings of a terrible march almost without a murmur, and to show them that they are not fighting for $13 per month, but for the cause—the proper development of our gold and other mineral resources, and of humanity. This exhibition of your gratitude need not be expensive. Let the private soldier feel that he is remembered by our people as the real defender of his country."

After parting with Gen. Crook, Aug. 24th, Gen. Terry crossed the Yellowstone and [Pg 69] marched down its left bank, his object being to intercept the Indians Crook was following if they attempted to cross the river. On the 27th he left the river, and moved northerly into the buffalo range where hunting parties were detailed who secured considerable game. The country was parched, the small streams dry, and water scarce. A scouting party made a detour to the north and west, but no Indians could be found. On the 5th of Sept. the whole command was at the mouth of Glendive Creek, where a military post had been established.

Gen. Terry now decided to close the campaign and distribute his troops to their winter quarters. The Montana column under Col. Gibbon started on the return march to Fort Ellis, 400 miles distant; Lieut. Col. Otis of the 22d Infantry, with his command, remained at Glendive Creek, to build a stockade and co-operate with Col. Miles, who was establishing a winter post at the mouth of Tongue River; and Gen. Terry with the balance of the troops started for Fort Buford at the mouth of the Yellowstone.

Hearing that Sitting Bull with a large band had recently crossed to the north side of the Missouri River near Fort Peck, Terry sent Reno with troops—then en route to Fort Buford—in pursuit. Reno marched to Fort Peck, and thence to Fort Buford, but encountered no Indians. A reconnoitering party under Long Dog had been near Fort Peck, and that chief passed one night at the agency. They did not want rations or annuities, but desired plenty of ammunition, for which they were ready to exchange 7th Cavalry horses, arms and equipments.

CHAPTER X.

AUTUMN ON THE YELLOWSTONE.

On the 10th of October, as a train escorted by two companies of the 6th Infantry was carrying supplies from Glendive Creek to the cantonment at the mouth of Tongue River, it was attacked by Indians, and was obliged to return to Glendive with a loss of sixty mules.

Lieut. Col. Otis was in command at Glendive, and on the 14th he again started out the train and personally accompanied it. The train consisted of 86 wagons, 41 of which were driven by soldiers, who had taken the places of as many citizen teamsters too demoralized by the recent attack to continue in the service. The military escort numbered with officers 196 men. The following interesting narrative of subsequent events is from the report of Col. Otis:—

> "We proceeded on the first day 12 miles, and encamped on the broad bottom of the Yellowstone River, without discovering a sign of the presence of Indians. During the night a small thieving party was fired upon by the pickets, but the party escaped, leaving behind a single pony, with its trappings, which was killed. At dawn of day, upon the 15th, the train pulled out in two strings, and proceeded quietly to Spring Creek, distant from camp about three miles, when I directed two mounted men to station themselves upon a hill beyond the creek, and watch the surrounding country until the train should pass through the defile. The men advanced at swift pace in proper direction, and when within 50 yards of the designated spot, they received a volley from a number of concealed Indians, when suddenly men and Indians came [Pg 71] leaping down the bluff. The men escaped without injury to person, although their clothing was riddled with bullets. I quickly advanced on the skirmish line, which drove out 40 or 50 Indians, and making a similar movement on the opposite flank, passed through the gorge and gained the high table land. Here, three or four scouts, sent out by Colonel Miles, from Tongue River, joined us. They had been driven into the Tongue upon the previous evening, there corraled, had lost their horses and one of their number, and escaped to the bluffs under cover of the darkness. The dead scout was found and buried.
>
> "The train proceeded along the level prairie, surrounded by the skirmish line, and the Indians were coming thick and fast from the direction of Cabin Creek. But few shots were exchanged, and both parties were preparing for the struggle which it was evident would take place at the deep and broken ravine at Clear Creek, through which the train must pass. We cautiously entered the ravine, and from 150 to 200 Indians had gained the surrounding bluffs to our left; signal fires were lighted for miles around, and extended far away on the opposite side of the Yellowstone. The prairies to our front were fired, and sent up vast clouds of smoke. We had no artillery, and nothing remained to us except to charge the bluffs. Company C, of the 17th Infantry, and Company H, of the 22d Infantry, were thrown forward upon the run, and gallantly scaled the bluffs, answering the Indian yell with one equally as barbarous, and driving back the enemy to another ridge of hills. We then watered all the stock at the creek, took on water for the men, and the train slowly ascended the bluffs.
>
> "The country now surrounding us was broken. The Indians continued to increase in numbers, surrounded the train, and the entire escort became engaged. The train was drawn up in four strings, and the entire escort enveloped it by a thin skirmish line. In that formation we advanced, the Indians pressing every point, especially the rear, Company C, 17th, which was only able to follow by charging the enemy, and then retreating rapidly toward the train, taking advantage of all the knolls and ridges in its course. The flanks, Companies G, 17th, and K and G, 22d, were advanced about 1000 yards, and the road was opened in the front, by Company H, 22d, by repeated charges. [Pg 72]
>
> "In this manner we advanced several miles, and then halted for the night upon a depression of the high prairie, the escort holding the surrounding ridge. The Indians now had attempted every artifice. They had pressed every point of the line, had run their fires through the train, which we were compelled to cross with great rapidity, had endeavored to approach under cover of smoke, when they found themselves

overmatched by the officers and men, who, taking advantage of the cover, moved forward and took them at close range. They had met with considerable loss, a good many of their saddles were emptied, and several ponies wounded. Their firing was wild in the extreme, and I should consider them the poorest of marksmen. For several hours they kept up a brisk fire and wounded but three of our men.

"Upon the morning of the 16th, the train pulled out in four strings, and we took up the advance, formed as on the previous day. Many Indians occupied the surrounding hills, and soon a number approached, and left a communication upon a distant hill. It was brought in by Scout Jackson, and read as follows:—

"YELLOWSTONE."

"I want to know what you are doing traveling on this road? you scare all the buffalo away. I want to hunt on the place. I want you to turn back from here: if you don't I will fight you again. I want you to leave what you have got here, and turn back from here.

"I am your friend,

SITTING BULL.

"I mean all the rations you have got and some powder; I wish you would write as soon as you can."

"I directed the Scout Jackson to inform the Indians that I had nothing to say in reply, except that we intended to take the train through to Tongue River, and that we should be pleased to accommodate them at any time with a fight. The train continued to proceed, and about eight o'clock the Indians began to gather for battle.

"We passed through the long, narrow gorge, near Bad Route Creek, when we again watered the stock, and took in wood and water, consuming in this labor about an hour's time. When we had pulled up the gentle ascent, the Indians had again surrounded us, but the lesson of the previous day taught them to keep at long range, and there was but little firing by either party. I counted 150 Indians in our rear, and from their movements and position I judged their numbers to be between 300 and 500. After proceeding a short distance, a flag of truce appeared on the left flank, [Pg 73] borne by two Indians, whom I directed to be allowed to enter the lines. They proved to be Indian scouts from Standing Rock Agency, bearing dispatches from Lieut. Col. Carlin, of the 17th Infantry, stating that they had been sent out to find Sitting Bull, and to endeavor to influence him to proceed to some military post and treat for peace.

"These scouts informed me that they had that morning reached the camp of Sitting Bull and Man-afraid-of-his-horse, near the mouth of Cabin Creek, and that they had talked with Sitting Bull, who wished to see me outside the lines. I declined the invitation, but professed a willingness to see Sitting Bull within my own lines. The scouts left me, and soon returned with three of the principal soldiers of Sitting Bull—the last named individual being unwilling to trust his person within our reach. The chiefs said that their people were angry because our train was driving away the buffalo from their hunting grounds, that they were hungry and without ammunition, and that they especially wished to obtain the latter; that they were tired of war, and desired to conclude a peace.

"I informed them that I could not give them ammunition, that had they saved the amount already wasted upon the train it would have supplied them for hunting purposes for a long time, that I had no authority to treat with them upon any terms whatever, but they were at liberty to visit Tongue River, and there make known conditions. They wished to know what assurance I could give them of their safety should they visit that place, and I replied that I could give them nothing but the word of an officer. They then wished rations for their people, promising to proceed to Fort Rock immediately, and from thence to Tongue River. I declined to give them rations, but finally offered them as a present 150lb. of hard bread and two sides of bacon, which they gladly accepted. The train moved on, and the Indians fell to the rear. Upon the following day I saw a number of them from Cedar Creek, far away to the right, and after that time they disappeared entirely.

"Upon the evening of the 18th I met Col. Miles encamped with his entire regiment on Custer Creek. Alarmed for the safety of the train, he had set out from Tongue River upon the previous day."

While Col. Otis was thus gallantly advancing with his train, Col. Miles, of the 5th [Pg 74] Infantry, fearing for its safety, had crossed the Yellowstone before daybreak on the 17th and started toward Glendive. He met Col. Otis, as above stated, on the evening of the 18th; and on being informed of the attack on the train, started in pursuit of the enemy. On the 21st, when about eight miles beyond Cedar Creek, a large number of Indians appeared in front of the column, and two of them, bearing a white flag, rode up to the line. They proved to be the Standing Rock ambassadors who had met Col. Otis; and brought word that Sitting Bull wished a conference with Col. Miles. Lieut. H.R. Bailey accompanied the two friendly Indians to the hostile camp, and there arranged with Sitting Bull's white interpreter for a meeting to take place between the lines.

The troops rested on their arms in line of battle while Col. Miles with a few officers rode forward and halted about half way between the two forces. Sitting Bull with a dozen unarmed warriors presently emerged from the hostile lines and walked slowly forward in single file. Col. Miles' party dismounted and advanced to meet them, and

the council began. The scene was picturesque and exciting; and the occasion one of much anxiety to the troops who remembered the assassination of Gen. Canby—especially so when dozens of armed warriors rode forward and surrounded the little group.

The "talk" was long and earnest; the Indians wanted an "old-fashioned peace," with privileges of trade—especially in ammunition, and demanded the discontinuing of supply trains and the abandonment of Fort Buford. Col. Miles explained that he could [Pg 75] only accept surrender on the terms of absolute submission to the U.S. Government. At evening the conference was adjourned to the next day, and the parties separated as quietly as they had assembled.

In the morning Col. Miles moved his command north, so as to intercept retreat in that direction. At about 11 A.M., Sitting Bull, Pretty Bear, Bull Eagle, John, Standing Bear, Gall, White Bull and others, came forward, marching abreast, and met Col. Miles and several officers on a knoll half way between the opposing lines. The Indians asked to be let alone, and professed a wish for peace, but such a peace as Col. Miles could not concede. "After much talk by the various chiefs, Sitting Bull was informed once and for all that he must accept the liberal conditions offered by the Government or prepare for immediate hostilities; and the council dispersed—Sitting Bull disappearing like a shadow in the crowd of warriors behind him."

> "The scene," wrote a correspondent of the *Army and Navy Journal*, "was now most animated. Col. Miles sent for his company commanders, and they came charging over the field to receive his final instructions. On the other side, the Sioux leaders rode hither and thither at full speed in front of their line, marshaling their men and haranguing them, calling on them to be brave. Sitting Bull's interpreter, Bruey, rode back to ask why the troops were following him? He was answered by Col. Miles, that the non-acceptance of the liberal terms offered was considered an act of hostility, and he would open fire at once. The whole line then advanced in skirmish order. One company occupied a knoll on the left with the 3-inch gun, the first shell from which was greeted with a hearty cheer from the advancing line. The Indians tried their old tactics and attempted rear and flank attacks from the ravines, but they found those vital points well protected by companies disposed *en potence*, which poured in a torrent of lead wherever an Indian showed himself. The firing then became general [Pg 76] along the whole line. Some of the sharpest shooting was done by the Sioux, and many officers only escaped "close calls" by the ends of their hair. Two enlisted men were wounded. Finally, Sitting Bull, finding his old plan of battle frustrated by that solid infantry skirmish line advancing upon him with the relentless sternness of fate, began a general and precipitate retreat."

The pursuit was resolutely kept up. The Indians fled down Bad Route Creek and across the Yellowstone, a distance of 42 miles, abandoning tons of dried meat, lodge-poles, camp equipments, ponies, etc. The troops on foot followed rapidly, not stopping to count the dead or gather the plunder; and the result was, that on the 27th of October five principal chiefs surrendered themselves to Col. Miles, on the Yellowstone, opposite the mouth of Cabin Creek, as hostages for the surrender of their whole people, represented as between 400 and 500 lodges, equal to about 2,000 souls. The hostages were sent under escort to Gen. Terry, at St. Paul, and the Indians were allowed five days in their then camp to gather food, and thirty days to reach the Cheyenne Agency on the Missouri River, where they were to surrender their arms and ponies, and remain either as prisoners of war or subject to treatment such as is usually accorded to friendly Indians.

Sitting Bull was not among the chiefs who surrendered; during the retreat, they said, he had slipped out, with thirty lodges of his own special followers, and gone northerly.

CHAPTER XI.

TERRY AND CROOK AT THE SIOUX AGENCIES.

The disarming and dismounting of the Sioux Agency Indians being deemed necessary as a precautionary measure, to prevent the hostile Indians from receiving constant supplies of arms, ammunition, and ponies from their friends at the agencies, General Sheridan directed Generals Crook and Terry to act simultaneously in accomplishing that object. The friendly and unfriendly Indians at the agencies were so intermixed, that it seemed impossible to discriminate between them.

After refitting at the Black Hills, Gen. Crook proceeded to the Red Cloud Agency, and found the Indians there in a dissatisfied mood and probably about to start to join the hostile bands. They had moved out some 25 miles from the agency, and refused to return although informed that no more rations would be given them till they did so.

At daylight, Oct. 22d, Col. Mackenzie, the post commander, with eight companies of the 4th and 5th Cavalry, surrounded the Indian camp containing 300 lodges, and captured Red Cloud and his whole band, men, squaws and ponies without firing a

shot, and marched them into the agency dismounted and disarmed. The Indians at Spotted Tail Agency were also disarmed and dismounted. [Pg 78]

Gen. Crook had an interview with Spotted Tail, and being satisfied that he was the only important Sioux leader who had remained friendly, he deposed Red Cloud, and declared Spotted Tail, his rival, the "Sachem of the whole Sioux Nation, by the grace of the Great Father the President. As the representative of the latter, Gen. Crook invested him with the powers of a grand chief, and in token thereof presented him his commission as such, written upon a parchment scroll tied with richly colored ribbons. Spotted Tail's heart was very glad."

"The line of the hostile and the peaceably disposed," wrote Gen. Crook at this time, "is now plainly drawn, and we shall have our enemies only in the front in the future. I feel that this is the first gleam of daylight we have had in this business."

Meantime Gen. Terry, with the 7th Cavalry and local garrisons, was disarming and dismounting the Indians at the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Agencies. The following is a copy of his report to Gen. Sheridan, written at Standing Rock, Oct. 25th:—

> "Colonel Sturgis left Lincoln on the 20th, Major Reno on the 21st, and each arrived here on the afternoon of the 22d. Sturgis immediately commenced dismounting and disarming the Indians at Two Bears' camp, on the left bank of the river, and Lieut. Col. Carlin, with his own and Reno's forces, dismounted and disarmed them at both camps on this side. Owing partially to the fact that before I arrived at Lincoln news was sent the Indians here, it is said, by Mrs. Galpin, that we were coming, and our purpose stated; but principally, I believe, that some time since, owing to the failure of the grass here, the animals were sent to distant grazing places many miles away, comparatively only a few horses were found. I, therefore, the next morning, called the chiefs together, and demanded the surrender of their horses and arms, telling them that unless they complied their rations would be stopped, and also telling them that whatever might be realized from the sale of the property taken would be invested in [Pg 79] stock for them. They have quietly submitted, and have sent out to bring in their animals. Some have already arrived, and we have now in our possession 700. More are arriving rapidly, and I expect to double that number. I have kept the whole force here until now for the effect its presence produces.
>
> "I shall start Sturgis to-morrow morning for Cheyenne, leaving Reno until Carlin completes the work here. Only a few arms have yet been found or surrendered, but I think our results are satisfactory. Not a shot was fired on either side of the river. Of course no surprise can now be expected at Cheyenne. The desired effect will be attained there by the same means as those employed here."

The late Sioux Commissioners, who made a treaty for the Black Hills in Sept. 1876, gave their pledge that all *friendly* Indians would be protected in their persons and property. Bishop Whipple comments on the dismounting of the Indians as follows:—

> "In violation of these pledges 2,000 ponies were taken from Cheyenne and Standing Rock Agencies. No inventory was kept of individual property. Of 1,100 ponies taken at Standing Rock, only 874 left Bismark for Saint Paul. No provision was made to feed them on the way. The grass had burned on the prairie and there was several inches of snow on the ground. The small streams were frozen, and no water was to be had until they reached the James River. There was no grass, and no hay could be purchased until they reached the Cheyenne River, more than ten days' travel, and then nothing until they reached Fort Abercrombie. No wonder that there were only 1,200 ponies out of 2,000 that left Abercrombie, and that of these only 500 reached St. Paul. The wretched, dying brutes were made the subject of jest as the war horses of the Dakota. Many died on the way, many were stolen, and the remnant were sold in St. Paul. It was worse than the ordinary seizure of property without color of law. It was not merely robbery of our friends. It was cruel. The Indians are compelled to camp from 10 to 40 miles away from the agency to find fuel. They have to cross this distance in the coldest weather to obtain their rations, and without ponies they must cross on foot, and some of them may perish."

Gen. Crook issued at Red Cloud Agency his General Orders, No. 8—in part as follows: [Pg 80]
—

> HEADQUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF THE PLATTE, IN THE FIELD,
> CAMP ROBINSON, NEB., Oct. 24th, 1876. }
>
> "The time having arrived when the troops composing the Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition are about to separate, the Brigadier-General commanding addresses himself to the officers and men of the command, to say:—
>
> "In the campaign now closed he has been obliged to call upon you for much hard service and many sacrifices of personal comfort. At times you have been out of reach of your base of supplies; in most inclement weather you have marched without food and slept without shelter. In your engagements you have evinced a high order of discipline and courage, in your marches wonderful powers of endurance, and in your deprivations and hardships, patience and fortitude.
>
> "Indian warfare is, of all warfare, the most trying, the most dangerous, and the most thankless; not recognized by the high authority of the United States Congress as war,

it still possesses for you the disadvantages of civilized warfare with all the horrible accompaniments that barbarians can invent and savages can execute. In it, you are required to serve without the incentive to promotion or recognition; in truth, without favor or hope of reward.

"The people of our sparsely settled frontier, in whose defence this war is waged, have but little influence with the powerful communities in the East; their representatives have little voice in our national councils, while your savage foes are not only the wards of the nation, supported in idleness, but objects of sympathy with a large number of people otherwise well informed and discerning. You may, therefore, congratulate yourselves that in the performance of your military duty you have been on the side of the weak against the strong, and that the few people there are on the frontier will remember your efforts with gratitude."

Gen. Crook's losses during the campaign extending from May 27th to Oct. 24th, were 12 killed, 32 wounded (most of whom subsequently returned to duty), one death by accident and one by disease.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WINTER OF 1876-7.

After leaving Red Cloud, Gen. Crook marched to Fort Fetterman and organized a new column for a winter expedition against the enemy. Subsequently, with a force of ten companies of cavalry under Col. Mackenzie, eleven companies of infantry and four of artillery under Lieut. Col. R.I. Dodge, and about 200 Indian allies, some of whom were friendly Sioux enlisted at Red Cloud Agency, Gen. Crook advanced to old Fort Reno, head of Powder River, where a cantonment had been built.

Hearing that a band of Cheyenne Indians were encamped among the Big Horn Mountains to the southwest, Gen. Crook, Nov. 23d, sent Col. Mackenzie with his cavalry and the Indian allies to hunt them up. At noon, Nov. 24th, after marching some 30 miles along the base of the mountains toward the Sioux Pass, Mackenzie met five of seven Indian scouts who had been sent ahead the evening previously. These scouts reported that they had discovered the camp of the Cheyennes at a point in the mountains about 20 miles distant, and that the other two scouts had remained to watch the camp.

A night's march was decided upon and, at sunset, after a halt of three hours, the command moved forward toward the village; but owing to the roughness of the country, it was daylight when they reached the mouth of a canyon leading to and near the village. Through this canyon the column advanced, crossing several deep ravines, and when within a mile of the camp the order to charge was given. The Indian allies, who were in front, rushed forward howling and blowing on instruments, and some of them subsequently ascended the side of the canyon and occupied a high bluff opposite to and overlooking the village. [Pg 82]

The surprise was nearly complete; but some of the Cheyennes, whom the scouts had reported as being engaged in a war dance, sounded the alarm on a drum, and began firing on the advancing column. The inhabitants immediately deserted their lodges, taking nothing but their weapons with them, and took refuge in a net-work of very difficult ravines beyond the upper end of the village. A brisk fight for about an hour ensued, after which skirmishing was kept up until night. The village of 173 lodges and their entire contents were destroyed, about 500 ponies were captured, and the bodies of 25 Indians killed in the engagement were found. Col. Mackenzie's loss was Lieut. J.A. McKinney and six men killed, and twenty-two men wounded.

On the 4th of Dec., Gen. Crook left Fort Reno with his whole force, and moved down Little Powder River, intending to form at its junction with Powder River a supply camp from which to operate against the Indians. Subsequently, however, he crossed over to the Belle Fourche River, and, Dec. 22d, started for Fort Fetterman where he arrived Dec. 29th. The weather during this homeward march was at times intensely cold, and the men and horses suffered considerably thereby. [Pg 83]

While Gen. Crook was thus looking for and harassing the Indians in the Powder River country, the isolated garrison of the Tongue River cantonment, further north, were not idle. An excursion northward in search of Sitting Bull was led by Col. Miles, the post-commander, and as reports as to the location of the Indians were conflicting and their trails obscured by snow, he divided his force, and sent Lieut. Frank D. Baldwin with three companies of the 5th Infantry to the north of the Missouri, while he examined the the Mussel Shell and Dry Forks country.

On the 7th of Dec., Lieut. Baldwin discovered Sitting Bull's band, and followed the Indians to the Missouri River, where they crossed and for a short time resisted the crossing of the troops. The Indians then retreated south, but were overtaken in the Redwood country and attacked, Dec. 18th. Their camp of 122 lodges was captured and burned with its contents, and 60 mules and horses were taken. The Indians

escaped, but carried off little property except what they had on their backs. Lieut. Baldwin's command marched on this expedition over 500 miles—walking on one occasion 73 miles in 48 hours—and endured the cold of a Montana winter with great fortitude.

A very unfortunate affair occurred at the Tongue River cantonment, within a few hundred yards of the parade-ground, Dec. 16th. The following is from Col. Miles' report thereof:—

> "As five Minneconjou chiefs were coming in, bearing two white flags, followed by twenty or thirty other Indians, and were passing by the Crow Indian camp, the five in advance were surrounded by twelve Crows and instantly killed. The act was an unprovoked, cowardly murder. The Crows approached them in a friendly manner, said "How," shook hands with them, and when they were within their power and partly behind a large wood pile, killed them in a most brutal manner. Upon hearing the first [Pg 84] shot, both officers and men rushed out and tried to save the Minneconjous, but could not reach them in time. The Crows were aware of the enormity of their crime, as they saw that the Minneconjous had a flag of truce, and they were told to come back. They were warned the day before against committing any act of violence against messengers or other parties coming in for friendly purposes. They tried to hide the flag of truce and, taking advantage of the momentary excitement, while efforts were being made to open communication and bring back the others, who were following, and who became alarmed and fled to the bluffs, the guilty Crow Indians jumped upon their ponies and fled to their agency in Montana. The only thing that can be said in defence of the Crows is, that a false report was made by one of the Crow women that the Sioux had fired upon her, and that within the last few months some of their number had lost relatives killed by the Sioux in the vicinity of the Rosebud. These Indians have claimed to be friends of the white man for years, have been frequently in the Government employ, and were brought down to fight such outlaws as Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse.
>
> "Those killed were believed to be Bull Eagle, Tall Bull, Red ——, Red Cloth, and one other prominent chief of the Sioux nation. I am unable to state the object of Bull Eagle's coming, but am satisfied he came with the best of motives. I can only judge from the following:—When he surrendered on the Yellowstone, after the engagement on Cedar Creek, he was the first to respond to my demands, and, I believe, was largely instrumental in bringing his people to accept the terms of the Government. When I had received five of the principal chiefs as hostages, and was about parting with him, I told him, if he had any trouble in going in, or his people hesitated or doubted that the Government would deal fairly and justly with them, to come back to me, and I would tell him what to do; that if he would come back to my command, I would be glad to see him and, so long as he complied with the orders of the Government, he could be assured of the friendship of its officers. I could not but regard him with respect, as he appeared in every sense a chief, and seemed to be doing everything in his power for the good of his people, and endeavoring to bring them to a more peaceful condition. He appeared to have great confidence in what I [Pg 85] told him; I gave him five days to obtain meat; during that time he lost three favorite ponies, which were brought to this place. During my absence he came in, bringing five horses that had strayed or been stolen from some citizens in the vicinity, and requested his own. He also inquired if he could send up to the Big Horn country for the remainder of his people, and take them in on the pass I had given him. He was informed by the commanding officer, Gen. Whistler (whom he had known for years before), that he could, and was told to send for them. Whether he had met with some trouble in taking his people in to their agency, and had returned, as I had told him, for directions, or had gathered up his people, and in passing had come in to apprise me of the fact, I know not; but there is every reason to believe that the above mentioned circumstances gave rise to his motives and prompted his actions.
>
> "The Crows were immediately disarmed, twelve of their ponies taken from them, and other considerations, together with a letter explaining the whole affair, were sent to the people and friends of those killed, as an assurance that no white man had any part in the affair, and that we had no heart for such brutal and cowardly acts.
>
> "It illustrates clearly the ferocious, savage instincts of even the best of these wild tribes, and the impossibility of their controlling their desire for revenge when it is aroused by the sight of their worst enemies, who have whipped them for years and driven them out of this country. Such acts are expected and considered justifiable among these two tribes of Indians, and it is to be hoped that the Sioux will understand that they fell into a camp of their ancient enemies, and did not reach the encampment of this command."

In January, 1877, Col. Miles with 350 of his troops marched southerly sixty miles up the Tongue River, and on the evening of the 7th discovered a large Indian village. Skirmishing ensued, and on the next day 1000 well-armed warriors appeared in front, and a battle was fought. The battle-ground was very rough and broken, and a heavy snow storm came on during the fight. The Indians fought with desperation; but [Pg 86] our troops had been so admirably arranged that they succeeded in gaining a decisive victory. The following is Col. Miles' report of the affair:—

> "I have the honor to report that this command fought the hostile tribes of Cheyenne and Ogallala Sioux, under Crazy Horse, in skirmishes on the 1st, 3d, and 7th of January, and in a five hours' engagement on the 8th inst. Their camp, consisting of some 500 lodges, extended three miles along the valley of Tongue River, below Hanging Woman's Creek. They were driven through the canyons of the Wolf or

Panther Mountains, in the direction of Big Horn Mountains. Their fighting strength outnumbered mine by two or three to one, but by taking advantage of the ground we had them at a disadvantage, and their loss is known to be heavy. Our loss is three killed and eight wounded. They fought entirely dismounted, and charged on foot to within fifty yards of Captain Casey's line, but were taken in front and flank by Captain Butler's and Lieutenant McDonald's companies. They were whipped at every point and driven from the field, and pursued so far as my limited supplies and worn down animals would carry my command."

The following additional particulars are derived from a letter to the *Army and Navy Journal*:—

"On the 5th January, Indian signs grew thicker and thicker. Miles of hastily abandoned war lodges were passed. The country became very rough. The valley of the Tongue grew narrower, the stream more tortuous, and the hills on both sides loftier and more precipitous, until the valley shrank into a prolonged and winding canyon. At short distances, jutting bluffs made narrow passes which offered points of vantage to the savage enemy. The gorges of the Wolf Mountains had been reached.

"On the 6th, the march was through a large war camp, recently and hurriedly abandoned. Unusual heat was followed by snow. In the evening there was snow and hail driven by a cruel wind, and by 5 P.M. it was pitch dark. On the evening of the 7th, the scouts captured four Cheyenne squaws, a youth, and three young children. Two hundred Indians made a dash at the scouts, shot two of their horses and made a desperate effort to take them. Casey opened a musketry fire on the Indians, and darkness supervening, they withdrew. [Pg 87]

"Next morning the fight was renewed shortly after daylight. The Indians charged down the valley in large force, close up to the skirmish line, but failed to make any impression. They then turned their attention to the flanks, and began to swarm on the bluffs to the right. The action then became general. The Indians were in strong force, and tried every point of the line. The hills and woods resounded with their cries and the high-pitched voices of the chiefs giving their orders.

"It is the opinion of some who have had years of experience in Indian fighting, that there has rarely, if ever, been a fight before in which the Sioux and Cheyenne showed such determination and persistency, where they were finally defeated. They had chosen their ground; and it has since been learned that they expected to make another Custer slaughter. The Cheyenne captives, in the hands of the troops, sang songs of triumph during the entire fight, in anticipation of a speedy rescue and the savage orgies of a massacre."

In a complimentary order to his troops, dated Jan. 31st, Col. Miles says:—

"Here in the home of the hostile Sioux, this command, during the past three months, has marched 1200 miles and fought three engagements—besides affairs of less importance. * * * Fortunate indeed is the officer who commands men who will improvise boats of wagon beds, fearlessly dash out into the cold and turbid waters, and amid the treacherous current and floating ice, cross and recross the great Missouri; who will defy the elements on these bleak plains in a Montana winter; and who have in every field defeated superior numbers."

The dismounting and disarming policy was kept up at the Agencies through the winter. Several bands came in and surrendered—among them that of Red Horse, who had been actively hostile. This chief thus describes the engagement on the Little Big Horn. The "brave officer" referred to is said to be Capt. T.H. French, of Reno's battalion.

"On the morning of the attack, myself and several women were out about a mile from camp gathering wild turnips. Suddenly one of the women called my attention to a cloud of dust rising in the neighborhood of the camp. I soon discovered that troops [Pg 88] were making an attack. We ran for the camp, and when I got there I was sent for at once to come to the council-lodge. I found many of the council men already there when I arrived. We gave directions immediately for every Indian to get his horse and arms; for the women and children to mount the horses and get out of the way, and for the young men to go and meet the troops.

"Among the troops was an officer who rode a horse with four white feet. The Indians have fought a great many tribes of people, and very brave ones, too, but they all say that this man was the bravest man they had ever met. I don't know whether this man was General Custer or not. This officer wore a large-brimmed hat and buckskin coat. He alone saved his command a number of times by turning on his horse in the retreat. In speaking of him, the Indians call him the 'man who rode the horse with four white feet.'

"After driving this party back, the Indians corraled them on top of a high hill, and held them there until they saw that the women and children were in danger of being made prisoners by another party of troops which just then made its appearance below. The word passed among the Indians like a whirlwind, and they all started to attack the new party, leaving the troops on the hill. When we attacked the other party, we swarmed down on them and drove them in confusion. No prisoners were taken. All were killed. None were left alive even for a few minutes. These troopers used very few of their cartridges. I took a gun and a couple of belts off two dead men. Out of one belt two cartridges were gone; out of the other five.

"It was with captured ammunition and arms that we fought the other body of troops. If

they had all remained together they would have hurt us very badly. The party we killed made five different starts. Once we charged right in until we scattered the whole of them, fighting among them hand to hand. One band of soldiers was right in the rear of us when they charged. We fell back, and stood for one moment facing each other. Then the Indians got courage and started for them in a solid body. We went but a little distance when we spread out and encircled them. All the time I could see their officers riding in front, and hear them shouting to their men. We finished up the party right there in the ravine. [Pg 89]

"The troops up the river made their first attack, skirmishing a little while after the fight commenced with the other troops below the village. While the latter fight was going on we posted some Indians to prevent the other command from forming a junction. As soon as we had finished the fight we all went back to massacre the troops on the hill. After skirmishing around awhile we saw the walking soldiers coming. These new troops making their appearance was the saving of the others. An Indian started to go to Red Cloud Agency that day, and when a few miles from camp discovered dust rising. He turned back and reported that a large herd of buffalo was approaching the camp, and a short time after he reported this the camp was attacked by troops."

In February, Spotted Tail, with a body-guard of 200 warriors, started out to visit his roaming brethren as a peacemaker; and through his influence, or for other reasons, all the hostile bands, it is believed, except Sitting Bull's, have accepted the terms offered by the Government and surrendered their arms and ponies. One band of about 1000 encircled the Indian camp at Spotted Tail Agency, April 16th, and after discharging their guns in the air by way of salutation, surrendered to Gen. Crook. Roman Nose, whose village was destroyed at Slim Buttes, indicated his desire for peace in a short speech and by laying his rifle at the feet of the General. Five days later, 500 Cheyennes, with 600 ponies, came into Red Cloud Agency. Their village near Sioux Pass had been destroyed in November, and they were in a destitute and pitiable condition.

Crazy Horse and his band of 900 Indians surrendered at Red Cloud, May 5th. They appeared to be in a comfortable condition and had 2000 ponies.

At the latest date, Sitting Bull and his band were reported moving toward Canada. If they return south, Col. Miles will be prepared to give them a suitable reception.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MAJOR-GENERAL CUSTER.

George Armstrong Custer, son of Emmanuel H. Custer, a hard-working, enterprising farmer, was born at New Rumley, Harrison County, Ohio, December 5th, 1839. He grew up into an active, athletic, and amiable youth, acquired a fair English education, and at the age of sixteen years engaged in teaching school near his native town.

Having determined to go to West Point if possible, young Custer addressed a letter on the subject to Hon. John A. Bingham, Member of Congress from his district, to whom he was personally unknown, and subsequently called on him. The result was that he entered West Point Academy as a cadet in 1857. The official notification of his appointment was signed by Jefferson Davis, President Buchanan's secretary of war.

As a cadet, Custer did not achieve a brilliant record either for scholarship or good behavior. This was not owing to any want of intelligence or quickness of comprehension, but rather to a love of mischief and hatred of restraint. During the four years of his academic term he spent 66 Saturdays in doing extra guard duty as penance for various offences; and he graduated in 1861, at the foot of a class of 34.

GENERAL GEORGE A. CUSTER.

His stay terminated with a characteristic incident. He chanced one day when officer [Pg 91]
of the guard to come upon two angry cadets, who from words had come to blows, and were just ready to settle their difficulty with their fists. Custer pushed through the crowd of spectators who surrounded the combatants, but instead of arresting them, as was his duty, he restrained those who were endeavoring to restrain them, and called out:—

"Stand back, boys; let's have a fair fight."

His appeal was heard by Lieuts. Hazen and Merritt, and he was placed under arrest and kept back to be court-martialed, while the rest of his class, (excepting such as had already resigned to join the Southern army) departed for active service. The court-martial was however cut short, through the exertions of his fellow cadets at Washington, by a telegraphic order summoning him there.

Custer reported to the Adjutant-General of the Army at Washington, July 20th, and was by him introduced to Gen. Scott. The company (G, 2nd Cavalry) to which he had been assigned, with the rank of 2nd lieutenant, was at this time near Centerville, and as he was to join it, Gen. Scott entrusted to him some dispatches for Gen. McDowell who commanded the troops in the field. A night's ride on horseback took him to the army, the dispatches were delivered, and then he joined his company before daybreak just as they were preparing to participate in the battle of Bull Run. In this battle, however, the cavalry took but little part; in the frantic retreat that followed, Custer's company was among the last to retire, and did so in good order, taking with them Gen. Heintzelman who was wounded.

After Gen. McClellan took command of the army, Custer's company was attached to [Pg 92]
Gen. Phil Kearny's brigade, and that general detailed Custer as his aid-de-camp, and afterwards as assistant adjutant-general, which position he held till deprived of it by a general order prohibiting officers of the regular army from serving on the staffs of volunteer officers.

About this time he obtained leave of absence on account of ill health, and visited his sister, Mrs. Reed, at her home in Monroe, Michigan; and it is said that through her entreaties and influence he then gave up the habit of using strong drinks, which, in common with many of his fellow officers, he had acquired during his brief army life near Washington. Thenceforth, through the remainder of his life, he drank no intoxicating liquor.

Returning to the army in Feb. 1862, he was assigned to the 5th Cavalry, and when the enemy evacuated Manassas he participated in the advance on that place, and led the company which drove the hostile pickets across Cedar Run.

When the Army of the Potomac was transferred to the Peninsula, Custer's company was among the first to reach Fortress Monroe, and it then marched to Warwick. Here he was detailed as assistant to the chief engineer, on Gen. W.F. Smith's staff; he served in that capacity during the siege of Yorktown, and planned the earthwork nearest the enemy's lines. At the battle of Williamsburg, where he acted as aid-de-camp to Gen. Hancock, he effected the capture of a battle-flag—the first taken by the

Army of the Potomac.

When the army was encamped near the Chickahominy River, late in May, Custer accompanied Gen. Barnard, the chief engineer of the army, on a reconnoisance [Pg 93] outside the picket line to the bank of the river; and at the request of his superior, he dismounted, jumped into the river, and waded across the stream—the object being to ascertain the depth of the water, which in some places came nearly up to his shoulders. On reaching the opposite bank he examined the ground for some distance, and discovered, unseen by them, the position of the enemy's pickets. Barnard reported to McClellan that the river was fordable, and how he had ascertained that it was so. McClellan sent for Custer, and was so pleased with his appearance and courageous act that he transferred him to his own staff; and in June, Custer received from the Secretary of War his appointment as additional aid-de-camp, with the rank of captain during the pleasure of the President. Previously to this he had crossed the Chickahominy at daybreak with a company of infantry, attacked the enemy's picket post, and captured prisoners and arms.

Custer served on McClellan's staff through all of the Peninsular campaign; and after the battles of Gaines' Mills, Fair Oaks, Malvern Hill, etc., retreated with him to the protection of the gunboats at Harrison's Landing on the James River. Subsequently, after the withdrawal of the army from the Peninsula and the defeat of Banks and Pope in Virginia, he was McClellan's aid-de-camp in the Maryland campaign which closed with the battle of Antietam. When McClellan was superseded by Burnside, Nov. 10th, 1862, Custer accompanied his chief to Washington, and subsequently visited his friends in Ohio and Michigan. His staff position as captain ceased with the retirement of McClellan, and he was now a first lieutenant, commissioned July 17th, 1862. [Pg 94]

In April, 1863, Custer rejoined his company which was with Gen. Hooker's army near Fredericksburg, and took part in the battle of Chancellorsville. In June he was on the staff of Gen. Pleasonton, then chief of the cavalry corps, and was conspicuous at Beverly Ford and other places across the Rappahannock where Stuart's cavalry were met and roughly handled.

At the battle of Aldie, Virginia, Custer distinguished himself in the charge made by Kilpatrick's cavalry. The onset was irresistible; the Confederate forces were driven back in confusion, and Custer's impetuosity carried him far within their lines, from which he was allowed to escape in consequence, he believed, of the similarity of his hat to those worn by the Confederates. For his gallantry in this action, Custer was promoted at one bound from a first lieutenant to a brigadier-general.

Gen. Custer was now assigned to the command of a Michigan brigade in Kilpatrick's division, the 1st, 5th, 6th and 7th Cavalry, and joined his command at Hanover, Md., June 29th. The next day he was engaged in a skirmish with Stuart's cavalry, and attracted the attention of all by the peculiarity of his dress. He wore a broad-brimmed, low-crowned felt hat; loose jacket and trowsers of velveteen, the former profusely trimmed with gold-braid and the latter tucked into high boots; a blue shirt, with turnover collar on either corner of which was an embroidered star; and a flaming neck-tie.

The battle of Gettysburg was now in progress, and on the 2nd of July Custer distinguished himself, and won the respect of his officers, by charging the enemy at the head of a company of his troops, having his horse shot under him. The next day his brigade was actively engaged, and the charge of the 1st Michigan Cavalry, [Pg 95] supported by a battery, is designated by Custer as one of the most brilliant and successful recorded in the annals of warfare.

After the battle Gen. Lee retreated rapidly toward the Potomac, and the cavalry moving by different routes harassed him continually, capturing trains and prisoners. The following paragraph is copied from Headley's "History of the Civil War."

> "Kilpatrick clung to the rebel army with a tenacity that did not allow it a moment's rest. At midnight, in a furious thunder storm, he charged down the mountain through the darkness with unparalleled boldness, and captured the entire train of Elwell's division, eight miles long. At Emmettsburg, Haggerstown, and other places, he smote the enemy, with blow after blow. Buford, Gregg, Custer, and others, performed deeds which, but for the greater movements that occupied public attention, would have filled the land with shouts of admiration. In fact, the incessant protracted labors of the cavalry during this campaign, rendered it useless for some time."

Custer's brigade came upon the enemy's rear guard at Falling Waters, and the 6th Michigan made a gallant charge which was repulsed with considerable loss; but after a two hours' fight the enemy was driven to the river; Gen. Pettegrew and 125 of his men were killed, and 1500 were taken prisoners; cannon and battle-flags were also captured.

When the cavalry crossed the Rappahannock in September, pushing back Stuart's cavalry to Brandy Station, Culpepper C.H., and across the Rapidan, Custer, as usual, was with the advance, and in one engagement was slightly wounded by a piece of a

shell—the first and only time he was wounded during the war. After a short vacation in consequence of his wound, he rejoined his command in season to accompany the [Pg 96] advance of cavalry to and across the Rapidan in October; and when Mead's army was forced back across the Rappahannock, he assisted in covering the retreat. The following description of the engagement at Brandy Station is also copied from Headley:—

> "Pleasonton, with the cavalry, remained behind to watch the enemy, and then slowly retired toward the retreating army. Buford had been forced back more rapidly than Kilpatrick, whose command—with Davis over the right brigade, and Custer over the left—fell back more slowly. When the latter reached Brandy Station, he found the former, ignorant of his movements, was far in advance, leaving his right entirely exposed. To make matters worse Stuart had passed around his left, so that Kilpatrick, with whom was Pleasonton himself, was suddenly cut off. The gallant leader saw at a glance the peril of his position, and, riding to a slight eminence took a hasty survey of the ground before him. He then gave his orders, and three thousand swords leaped from their scabbards, and a long, loud shout rolled over the field.
>
> "With a heavy line of skirmishers thrown out, to protect his flanks and rear, he moved in three columns straight on the rebel host that watched his coming. At first, the well-closed columns advanced on a walk, while the batteries of Pennington and Elder played with fearful precision upon the hostile ranks. He thus kept on, till within a few hundred yards of the rebel lines, when the band struck up "Yankee Doodle." The next instant, a hundred bugles pealed the charge, and away, with gleaming sabres and a wild hurrah, went the clattering squadrons. As they came thundering on, the hostile lines parted, and let them pass proudly through. Buford was soon overtaken, and a line of battle formed; for the rebels, outraged to think they had let Kilpatrick off so easy, reorganized, and now advanced to the attack.
>
> "A fierce cavalry battle followed, lasting till after dark. Pleasonton, Buford, Kilpatrick, Custer and Davis again and again led charges in person. It seemed as if the leaders on both sides were determined to test, on the plains of Brandy Station, the question of superiority between the cavalry; for the charges on both sides were of the most gallant and desperate character. The dark masses would drive on each other, through [Pg 97] the deepening gloom, with defiant yells, while the flashing sabres struck fire as they clashed and rung in the fierce conflict. At length the rebels gave it up, and our cavalry, gathering up its dead and wounded, crossed the Rappahannock."

In the spirited encounter near Buckland's Mills, Oct. 19th, in which Stuart, aided by a flank attack from Fitz Hugh Lee, worsted Kilpatrick by force of numbers, Custer's brigade bore the brunt of the attack, and did most of the fighting on our side. This fight terminated the active campaign of 1863 for Custer's brigade, which subsequently guarded the upper fords of the Rapidan.

On the 9th of February, 1864, Gen. Custer was married at Monroe, Michigan, to Miss Elizabeth Bacon, only daughter of Judge Daniel S. Bacon of Monroe. When he rejoined his command at Stevensburg a few days later, his wife accompanied him, and she remained in camp till the opening of the spring campaign of 1864. The marriage was, as far as Custer was concerned, the consequence of love at first sight, and ever proved to be for both parties a happy one.

Late in February, 1864, Gen. Custer crossed the Rapidan with 1500 cavalry in light marching order, flanking Lee's army on the west, and pushed rapidly ahead to within four miles of Charlottesville, where he found his progress arrested by a far superior force. He then turned northward toward Stannardsville where he again encountered the enemy, and after skirmishing, returned to his camp followed by some hundreds of refugees from slavery. This raid was designed to draw attention from a more formidable one led by Kilpatrick at the same time.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MAJOR-GENERAL CUSTER.

(CONTINUED.)

In the spring of 1864, Gen. Grant was placed at the head of all the Union armies; Gen. Sheridan was called to command the cavalry corps in place of Gen. Pleasonton; and Custer with his brigade was transferred to the First division under Torbert.

In May, the Army of the Potomac once more advanced to the Rapidan and crossed it. In the battle of the Wilderness, owing to the character of the field, the cavalry were compelled to remain almost idle spectators, but subsequently, at Spottsylvania C.H., Torbert's division was seriously engaged.

On the 9th of May, Gen. Sheridan started out on his first great cavalry raid toward Richmond. At Beaverdam Station he inflicted great damage on the railroads, destroyed much property, and liberated 400 Union prisoners on their way to Richmond. Continuing his march, he found, at Yellow Tavern a few miles north of Richmond, Stuart's cavalry drawn up to oppose his passage. A spirited fight ensued,

resulting in the death of Stuart and the dispersion of his troops. Our cavalry pressed on down the road to Richmond, and Custer's brigade attacked and carried the outer line of defenses, and took 100 prisoners. The second line of works was too strong to [Pg 99] be taken by cavalry, and Sheridan was obliged to retreat. Beating off assailants both in front and rear he crossed the Chickahominy, pushed southward to Haxall's Landing on the James River, and then leisurely returned by way of White House and Hanover C.H. to Grant's army, arriving in time to be present at the sanguinary battle of Cool Arbor.

On the 9th of June, Custer accompanied Sheridan on a raid around Lee's army. They struck the railroad at Trevilian's, drove off a large force of the enemy and broke up a long section of the road. Retracing their steps to Trevilian's, they had there a spirited contest with Fitz Hugh Lee, and then drew off and rejoined Gen. Grant. During this raid Sheridan lost over 700 men, and captured 400 prisoners.

In the autumn of 1864, two divisions of cavalry under Torbert were with Sheridan's army operating in the Shenandoah Valley. Custer's brigade was in the First division, commanded by Merritt. Averill commanded the Second division.

Having received from Gen. Grant the order, "Go in"—the only instructions which Grant deemed it necessary to give—Sheridan, Sept. 19th, attacked the Confederate forces at Opequan Creek. The artillery opened along the whole line, the columns moved steadily forward, and Gen. Early soon discovered that Sheridan was in earnest. Early's position was a strong one, and he stubbornly held it until the cavalry bugles were heard on his right, as the firm-set squadrons bore fiercely down. Rolled up before the impetuous charge, the rebel line at length crumbled into fragments, and the whole army broke in utter confusion and was sent "whirling through Winchester," followed until dark by the pursuing cavalry. 3000 prisoners were taken. [Pg 100]

Three days later Sheridan attacked Early at Fisher's Hill—a strong position to which he had retired—and again forced him to retreat with a loss of 1100 men taken prisoners. The cavalry pursued so sharply and persistently, that Early left the valley and took refuge in the mountains where cavalry could not operate.

On the 26th of Sept., Custer was transferred from the command of the Michigan brigade in the First division to the head of the Second division; but before he was able to reach his new command, he was placed at the head of the Third division, with which he had formerly been connected under Kilpatrick.

When Sheridan moved back through the valley from Port Republic to Strasburg, sparing the houses, but burning all the barns, mills and hay-stacks, and driving off all the cattle, his rear was much harassed by the rebel cavalry under Gen. Rosser—a class-mate of Custer's at West Point; and on the night of Oct. 8th, Sheridan ordered Torbert to "start out at daylight, and whip the rebel cavalry or get whipped himself." Accordingly on the next morning the cavalry, led on by Merritt and Custer and supported by batteries, swept boldly out to attack a larger force drawn up in battle array. At the first charge upon them Rosser's men broke and fled, but subsequently rallied, and were again pushed back and utterly routed. Rosser lost all his artillery but one piece, and everything else which was carried on wheels, and was pursued to Mt. Jackson, 26 miles distant. Of this affair, Gen. Torbert reported:—

> "The First Division captured five pieces of artillery, their ordnance, ambulance, and [Pg 101] wagon trains, and 60 prisoners. The Third Division captured six pieces of artillery, all of their headquarter wagons, ordnance, ambulance, and wagon trains. There could hardly have been a more complete victory and rout. The cavalry totally covered themselves with glory, and added to their long list of victories the most brilliant one of them all, and the most decisive the country has ever witnessed."

On the 15th of Oct., Sheridan started on a flying visit to Washington, leaving his army encamped on three ridges or hills. The crest nearest the enemy was held by the Army of West Virginia under Crook; half a mile to the rear of this was the second one, held by the 19th Corps under Emory; and still further to the rear, on the third crest, was the 6th Corps under Gen. Wright, who commanded the whole army during Sheridan's absence. The cavalry under Torbert lay to the right of the 6th Corps.

Gen. Early, having resolved to surprise and attack the Union army, started out his troops on a dark and foggy night, and advanced unperceived and unchallenged in two columns along either flank of the 6th Corps. The march was noiseless; and trusty guides led the steady columns through the gloom, now pushing through the dripping trees and now fording a stream, till at length, an hour before day-break, Oct. 18th, Early's troops, shivering with cold, stood within 600 yards of Crook's camp. Two of Crook's pickets had come in at 2 A.M. and reported a heavy, muffled tramp heard at the front; but though some extra precautions were taken, no one dreamed that an attack would be made.

Crook's troops, slumbering on unconscious of danger, were awakened at daybreak by a deafening yell and the crack of musketry on either flank; following which, charging lines regardless of the pickets came immediately on over the breastworks. The [Pg 102] surprise was complete, and after a brief struggle the Army of West Virginia was

flying in confusion toward the second hill occupied by the 19th Corps. Emory attempted to stop the progress of the enemy, but they got in his rear, and his command soon broke and fled with the rest toward the hill where the 6th Corps lay.

Gen. Wright formed a new line of battle, and repulsed a tremendous charge of the enemy, thus obtaining time to cover the immense crowd of fugitives that darkened the rear. A general retreat was then begun and continued in good order till 10 A.M. when, the enemy having ceased to advance, Wright halted and commenced reorganizing the scattered troops. The cavalry, being at the rear and extreme right, had not suffered in the first assault on the Union army, but they were subsequently transferred to the left flank, and did brave service in covering the retreat of the infantry.

Meanwhile Sheridan, returning from Washington, had slept at Winchester 20 miles distant, and in the morning rode leisurely toward his army. The vibrations of artillery at first surprised him, and he soon became aware that a heavy battle was raging and that his army was retreating. Dashing his spurs into his horse he pushed madly along the road, and soon left his escort far behind. Further on he met fugitives from the army, who declared that all was lost. As the cloud of fugitives thickened he shouted, as he drove on and swung his cap, "Face the other way, boys; we are going back to our camp; we are going to lick them out of their boots." The frightened stragglers paused, and then turned back.

On arriving at the front, where the work of reorganization was already well advanced, Sheridan inspired his men with new courage by his appearance and words. For two hours he rode back and forth in front of the line, encouraging the troops; and when the order was given, "The entire line will advance, etc.," the infantry went steadily forward upon the enemy. Early's front was soon carried, while his left was partly turned back; and after much desperate fighting, his astonished troops turned and fled in utter confusion over the field. [Pg 103]

> "As they streamed down into the Middletown meadow," says Headley, "Sheridan saw that the time for the cavalry had come, and ordered a charge. The bugles pealed forth their stirring notes, and the dashing squadrons of Custer and Merritt came down like a clattering tempest on the right and left, doubling up the rebel flanks, and cleaving a terrible path through the broken ranks. Back to, and through our camp, which they had swept like a whirlwind in the morning, the panic-stricken rebels went, pellmell, leaving all the artillery they had captured, and much of their own, and strewing the way with muskets, clothing, knapsacks, and everything that could impede their flight. The infantry were too tired to continue the pursuit, but the cavalry kept it up, driving them through Strasburg to Fisher's Hill, and beyond, to Woodstock, sixteen miles distant."

After the battle of Cedar Creek and during the winter of 1864—5, Sheridan's army, including Custer's division, remained inactive, occupying cantonments around Winchester.

On the 27th of Feb., Sheridan started out on his last great raid, taking with him Gen. Merritt as chief of cavalry, the First and Third divisions of cavalry under Generals Devin and Custer, artillery, wagons, and pack-mules. The raiding column, including artillerymen and teamsters, numbered 10,000 men.

Moving rapidly up the Shenandoah Valley over the turnpike road, they passed many villages without halting or opposition, and on the 29th, approached Mount Crawford, where Rosser with 400 men disputed the passage over a stream and attempted to burn the bridge; but Col. Capehart of Custer's command, which was in advance, by a bold dash drove Rosser away and saved the bridge. [Pg 104]

Custer now pushed on to Waynesboro' and finding Early intrenched there, immediately attacked him. The result, as told by Sheridan, was as follows:—

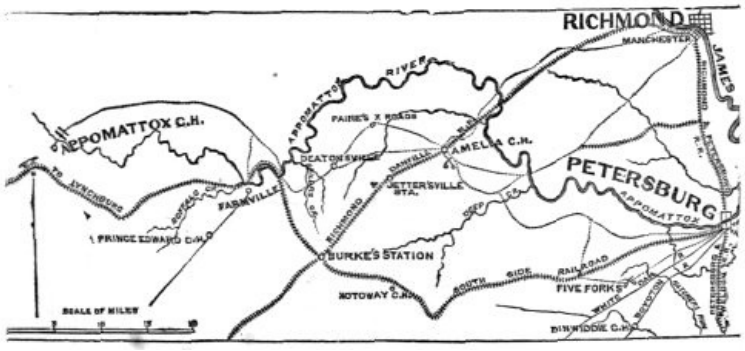
> "Gen. Custer found Gen. Early in a well chosen position, with two brigades of infantry, and some cavalry under Rosser, the infantry occupying breastworks. Custer, without waiting for the enemy to get up courage over the delay of a careful reconnaissance, made his dispositions for attack at once. Sending three regiments around the left flank of the enemy, Custer with the other two brigades, partly mounted and partly dismounted, at a given signal attacked and impetuously carried the enemy's works; while the Eight New York and the First Connecticut cavalry, who were formed in columns of fours, charged over the breastworks, and continued the charge through the streets of Waynesboro', sabring a few men as they went along, and did not stop until they had crossed the South Fork of the Shenandoah, (which was immediately in Early's rear) where they formed as foragers, and with drawn sabres held the east bank of the stream. The enemy threw down their arms and surrendered, with cheers at the suddenness with which they had been captured."

Sixteen hundred prisoners, 11 pieces of artillery, 200 loaded wagons, and 17 battle-flags were captured single-handed by Custer at Waynesboro', while his own loss was less than a dozen men. Vast amounts of public property were subsequently destroyed. The prisoners were sent to Winchester under guard.

Pushing on across the Blue Ridge in a heavy rain during the night after Early's

defeat, Custer, still in the van, approached Charlottesville the next afternoon, and was met by the authorities, who surrendered to him the keys of the public buildings as a token of submission. The balance of the column soon came up, and two days were spent in destroying bridges, mills, and the railroad leading to Lynchburg. [Pg 105]

Sheridan now divided his command, and sent Merritt and Devin to destroy the canal from Scottsville to New Market, while he and Custer tore up the railroads as far west as Amherst C.H. The columns united again at New Market on the James River; and as the enemy had burned the bridges so they could not cross to the south side, they moved eastward behind Lee's army, destroying bridges, canals, railroads and supplies, thus inflicting a more serious blow to the confederate cause than any victories by land or sea gained during the last campaign. Then they swept around by the Pamunkey River and White House, and joined Grant's besieging army in front of Petersburg, March 27th. They encamped on the extreme left of the lines, close to their old comrades of the Second Division of cavalry, (now under Gen. Crook) who here again came under Sheridan's command.



CHAPTER XV.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MAJOR-GENERAL CUSTER.

(CONTINUED.)

The final struggle for the possession of Richmond and Petersburg was now commenced by an extension of the Union lines westward, Grant's object being to attack the right flank of the Confederates.

On the 29th of March, Sheridan, with his cavalry, moved southwest to Dinwiddie C.H., where Devin's and Crook's divisions halted for the night. Custer was some distance in the rear protecting the train. In the morning, Devin pushed the enemy back northerly to their intrenchments at Five Forks; but being unable to advance further, he returned to Dinwiddie C.H. Gen. Warren, with the 5th Infantry Corps, had meantime been put under Sheridan's command as a support to the cavalry, but had not yet come up.

The next day, 31st, Lee's troops attacked Warren unexpectedly, and drove two of his divisions back upon a third, where their advance was stopped; and with the assistance of Humphrey's 2nd Corps, the enemy were driven back into their entrenched position along the White Oak road. Then the rebel infantry moved westward along the road to Five Forks, and attacked Devin, who, earlier in the day, had advanced to Five Forks and carried that position. Devin was driven out in disorder and forced back, and after some difficulty rejoined Crook's division at Dinwiddie C. H. The confederates now assailed Sheridan with a superior force, but could make no headway, and during the night they withdrew. [Pg 107]

Meantime Custer, and Gen. McKenzie with 1,000 additional cavalry, had joined Sheridan, and Warren was within supporting distance. At daybreak the cavalry advanced steadily on the enemy, and by noon had driven them behind their works at Five Forks, and were menacing their front. Warren was now ordered forward, and after more delay than Sheridan deemed necessary, he reached his assigned position and charged furiously westward on the enemy's left flank. Custer and Devin at the same time charged their right flank and front. Thus assailed by double their numbers the rebel infantry fought on with great gallantry and fortitude; but at length their flank defenses were carried by Warren's troops, and simultaneously the cavalry swept over their works. A large portion of the enemy surrendered, and the balance fled westward, pursued by Custer and McKenzie; 5,000 prisoners were taken.

The next morning, Sunday, April 2nd, at daybreak, a general assault was made by Grant's army upon the defences of Petersburg, and some of them were carried. Lee telegraphed to Davis that Richmond must be evacuated; and by night the Confederate rule in that city was ended, and Davis and his Government on the way

by railroad to Danville. Lee's troops withdrew from Richmond and Petersburg the same night, and marched rapidly westward to Amelia C.H. on the Danville railroad, where they halted, April 4th and 5th, to gather supplies of food from the country.

[Pg 108]

Meantime, the Union army was pursuing the retreating Confederates and making every effort to prevent their escape. Custer and Devin moved southwesterly toward Burkesville destroying the railroad, and then joined Crook, McKenzie, and the 5th Corps at Jetersville five miles west of Amelia C.H. Sheridan intrenched his infantry across the railroad, supported them by his cavalry, and felt prepared to stop the passage of Lee's whole army. Lee, however, finding his way to Danville thus blocked, moved northerly around Sheridan's left, and thence westerly toward Farmville on the Appomattox River. Gen. Davies, of Crook's division, made a reconnoisance and struck Lee's train moving ahead of his troops, destroying wagons, and taking prisoners. A fight followed, and Davies fell back to Jetersville where nearly the whole army was then concentrated.

On the morning of the 6th, Crook, Custer, and Devin started out in pursuit. Crook, who was in advance, was ordered to attack the trains, and if the enemy was too strong, another division was to pass him, while he held fast and pressed the enemy, and attack at a point further on—thus alternating until some vulnerable point was found. Crook came upon Lee's columns near Deatonsville, and charged upon them, determined to detain them at any cost. Crook was finally repulsed, but his action gave Custer time to push ahead, and strike further on at Sailor's Creek. Crook and Devin came promptly to Custer's support, and he pierced the line of march, destroyed 400 wagons, and took many prisoners. Elwell's division was separated from Lee, who was further ahead, and being enclosed between the cavalry in front and the infantry on their rear, the troops threw down their arms and surrendered.

[Pg 109]

That evening Lee crossed the Appomattox at Farmville, and tried to burn the bridges behind him, but troops arrived in season to save one of them. Lee halted five miles beyond Farmville, intrenched himself, and repulsed an attack from the infantry. At night he silently resumed his retreat.

On the morning of the 7th, Custer and Devin, under Merritt, were sent on a detour to the left, to cut off retreat toward Danville should it be attempted; while Crook forded the Appomattox and attacked a train. On the 8th, Sheridan concentrated the cavalry at Prospect Station, and sent Merritt, Custer, and Devin swiftly ahead 28 miles to Appomattox Station, where, he had learned from scouts, were four trains loaded with supplies for Lee, just arrived from Lynchburg.

Gen. Custer took the lead, and on reaching the railroad station he skillfully surrounded and captured the trains. Then, followed by Devin, he hurried on five miles further to Appomattox C.H., where he confronted the van of Lee's army, immediately attacked it, and by night had turned it back on the main column, and captured prisoners, wagons, guns, and a hospital train. The balance of the cavalry hurried up, and a position was taken directly across the road, in front of Lee's army.

By a forced march the infantry under Griffin and Ord, supporting the cavalry, reached the rear of Sheridan's position by daybreak the next morning. Grant and Mead were pressing closely on Lee's rear, and Lee saw there was no escape for him unless he could break through the cavalry force which he supposed alone disputed his passage. He therefore ordered his infantry to advance. The result of this charge, the last one made by the Army of Virginia, is thus described in Greeley's "*American Conflict*":—

[Pg 110]

> "By Sheridan's orders, his troopers, who were in line of battle dismounted, gave ground gradually, while showing a steady front, so as to allow our weary infantry time to form and take position. This effected, the horsemen moved swiftly to the right, and mounted, revealing lines of solid infantry in battle array, before whose wall of gleaming bayonets the astonished enemy recoiled in blank despair, as Sheridan and his troopers, passing briskly around the rebel left, prepared to charge the confused, reeling masses. A white flag was now waved by the enemy before Gen. Custer, who held our cavalry advance, with the information that they had concluded to surrender."

The next day, April 9th, Gen. Custer, who had been brevetted Major-General after the battle of Cedar Creek, issued the following complimentary order to his troops:—

> HEAD-QUARTERS THIRD CAVALRY DIVISION.
> APPOMATTOX COURT HOUSE, VA., April 9, 1865.
>
> SOLDIERS OF THE THIRD CAVALRY DIVISION:—
>
> With profound gratitude toward the God of battles, by whose blessings our enemies have been humbled and our arms rendered triumphant, your Commanding General avails himself of this his first opportunity to express to you his admiration of the heroic manner in which you have passed through the series of battles which to-day resulted in the surrender of the enemy's entire army.
>
> The record established by your indomitable courage is unparalleled in the annals of war. Your prowess has won for you even the respect and admiration of your enemies.

During the past six months, although in most instances confronted by superior numbers, you have captured from the enemy, in open battle, 111 pieces of field artillery, 65 battle-flags, and upward of 10,000 prisoners of war including seven general officers. Within the last ten days, and included in the above, you have captured 46 field-pieces of artillery and 37 battle-flags. You have never lost a gun, never lost a color, and have never been defeated; and notwithstanding the numerous engagements in which you have borne a prominent part, including those memorable battles of the Shenandoah, you have captured every piece of artillery which the enemy has dared to open upon you. The near approach of peace renders it improbable that you will again be called upon to undergo the fatigues of the toilsome march, or the exposure of the battle-field; but should the assistance of keen blades wielded by your sturdy arms be required to hasten the coming of that glorious peace for which we have been so long contending, the General Commanding is firmly confident that, in the future as in the past, every demand will meet a hearty and willing response. [Pg 111]

Let us hope that our work is done, and that blessed with the comforts of peace, we may be permitted to enjoy the pleasures of home and friends. For our comrades who have fallen, let us ever cherish a grateful remembrance. To the wounded and to those who languish in Southern prisons, let our heartfelt sympathy be tendered.

And now, speaking for myself alone, when the war is ended and the task of the historian begins; when those deeds of daring which have rendered the name and fame of the Third Cavalry Division imperishable are inscribed upon the bright pages of our country's history, I only ask that my name may be written as that of the Commander of the Third Cavalry Division.

Lee's flag of truce at Appomattox—a white towel—and also the table on which Grant and Lee signed the capitulation agreement, were presented to Mrs. Custer by Gen. Sheridan, and are now in her possession. In a letter accompanying them Sheridan wrote, that he "knew of no person more instrumental in bringing about this most desired event than her own most gallant husband."

In the great parade of the Army of the Potomac at Washington in May 1865, Sheridan's cavalry were at the head of the column; and the Third Division, first in peace as it had been first in war, led the advance. Custer, now a Major-General of volunteers, at the age of 26 years, rode proudly at the head of his troopers, a prominent figure in the stirring pageant, and the observed of all beholders. He had put off for the occasion his careless dashing style of dress, and wore, with becoming dignity, the full regulation uniform of a Major-General. [Pg 112]

Shortly after the parade, Custer was sent to Texas, where he had command of a cavalry division at Austin, but no active service became necessary. In March, 1866, he was mustered out of service as a Major-General, and took rank as a Captain, assigned to the 5th Cavalry, U.S.A. Soon afterward, he applied to Senor Romero, Minister from Mexico, for a position as chief of President Juarez's cavalry, in his struggle with Maximilian. He presented a letter of introduction from General Grant in which he was spoken of in the most complimentary terms. Romero was anxious to secure his services, and made him liberal offers; but as Custer could not obtain leave of absence from his Government, the contemplated arrangement was not completed.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MAJOR-GENERAL CUSTER.

(CONTINUED.)

In July, 1866, Custer received from Andrew Johnson, a commission as Lieut. Col. of the 7th Cavalry—a new regiment; and after accompanying the President on his famous tour through the country, he proceeded to Fort Riley, Kansas.

In the spring of 1867, an expedition under Gen. Hancock marched from Fort Riley to Fort Larned near the Arkansas River, and the 7th Cavalry, under Lieut. Col. Custer, accompanied it. The dissatisfied Indians had been invited by the Indian agent to meet Hancock in council at Fort Larned, and had agreed to do so; but as they failed to appear at the appointed time, Hancock started for a village of Sioux and Cheyenne Indians, distant some 30 miles from the fort. On the way he met several of the chiefs, and they agreed to hold a council at Hancock's camp on the next day, April 14th. As none of the chiefs came, as promised, Hancock again started for their village, and soon came upon several hundred Indians drawn up in battle array directly across his path. The troops were immediately formed in line of battle, and then the General, with some of his officers and the interpreter, rode forward and invited the chiefs to a [Pg 114] meeting between the lines, which were half a mile apart. The invitation was accepted; several chiefs advanced to the officers, and a friendly interview was holden —all seeming pleased at the peaceful turn things had taken. The result of the "talk" was an arrangement for a council to be held at Hancock's headquarters after he had camped near the Indian village, toward which both parties then proceeded. It was ascertained on reaching it that the women and children had been sent away; and during the night the warriors, unobserved by the white men, also fled, leaving their lodges and stores.

Mistrusting something of the kind, Custer, with the cavalry, had during the night stealthily surrounded the village, and on entering it later found it deserted. Pursuit of the Indians was commenced, but their trail soon scattered so it could not be followed. After burning the deserted village, the expedition returned to Fort Hayes, where the 7th Cavalry wintered.

The next summer, Custer with several companies of his regiment and 20 wagons, was sent on a long scouting expedition to the southward in search of Indians. Leaving Fort Hayes in June, he proceeded to Fort McPherson on the Platte River, and thence to the forks of the Republican River in the Indian country. From this place he sent Major J.A. Elliott, on the 23d of June, with ten men and one guide, to carry despatches to Gen. Sherman at Fort Sedgwick, 100 miles distant. The wagons, escorted by cavalry, were also started the same day to procure supplies from Fort Wallace, about the same distance away in an opposite direction.

Early the next morning, an attack was made on the camp, but the soldiers rallied so promptly and effectively that the Indians soon withdrew. Interpreters were then sent [Pg 115] toward them, who arranged for a council which was held near by. After an unsatisfactory interview, Custer returned to his camp and started in pursuit of the Indians, but was unable to overtake them.

On the fifth day after his departure, Major Elliott returned in safety to the camp. He had traveled only by night, and had seen no Indians. The wagon train was not so fortunate. It reached Fort Wallace safely, and started to return escorted by 48 troopers. On the way it was attacked by a large number of Indians, who for three hours kept up a running fight around the circle. The wagons moved forward in two strings, with the cavalry horses between them for safety, and the dismounted soldiers defended them so successfully that their progress forward was uninterrupted. Meanwhile Custer, fearing for the safety of the train, had sent out cavalry to meet it; and their approach caused the Indians to cease from their attack and withdraw. The balance of the journey was safely accomplished.

Resuming his march, Custer again struck the Platte, some distance west of Fort Sedgwick. Here he learned by telegraph that Lieut. Kidder with ten men and an Indian scout had started from Fort Sedgwick, with despatches for Custer directing him to proceed to Fort Wallace, shortly after Major Elliott had left the fort. As Kidder had not returned and Custer had not seen him, fears for his safety were entertained, and Custer immediately started for his late camp at the forks of the Republican. On the way thither some of his men deserted, and being followed and refusing to [Pg 116] surrender, were fired upon, and three were wounded.

On reaching the camp, an examination was made by the Indian guide, and it was ascertained that Kidder's party had arrived there in safety, and continued on towards Fort Wallace, over the trail made by the wagons. In the morning Custer started in pursuit, and by noon it became evident by the tracks of their horses, that Kidder's party had been hard chased for several miles. Further on one of their horses was found, shot dead; and at last the mutilated and arrow-pierced bodies of the 12 men were found lying near each other. They had been chased, overtaken, and killed by the savages. They were buried in one grave, and the troops proceeded to Fort Wallace.

Custer had been ordered to report to Gen. Hancock at Fort Wallace, and receive further orders from him; but on arriving there he found that the General had retired to Fort Leavenworth. The location of Fort Wallace was isolated and remote from

railroads, and as the stock of provisions was low, Custer decided to go for supplies. He started on the evening of July 15th, with 100 men, and arrived at Fort Hayes on the morning of July 18th, having marched 150 miles, with a loss of two men who had been surprised by Indians. He then proceeded to Fort Harker, 60 miles further on, and after making arrangements for the supplies, obtained from Gen. Smith permission to visit his wife, who was at Fort Riley, 90 miles distant by rail.

Soon after this Custer was arraigned before a court-martial, charged with leaving Fort Wallace without orders, and making a journey on private business, during which two soldiers were killed; also for over-tasking his men on the march, and for cruelty [Pg 117] while quelling a mutiny. After trial, he was pronounced guilty of a breach of discipline in making a journey on private business (which he earnestly denied) and acquitted of the other charges. His sentence was a suspension of pay and rank for a year, during which period he remained in private life, while his regiment was engaged in an expedition under Gen. Sully.

In October, 1868, Custer was recalled into service, and joined his regiment at Fort Dodge on the Arkansas River. Early in Nov., a winter campaign against the Indians was commenced. Gen. Sully, with the 7th Cavalry, detachments of infantry, and a large supply train, marched to the borders of the Indian country and established a post called Camp Supply.

On the 23d of Nov., Custer with his regiment of about 800 men started out in a snow storm on a scout for the enemy. The next day a trail was discovered and pursued, and at night the troops were in the valley of the Washita River, and near an Indian village which had been seen from a distance. The village was stealthily surrounded, and at daybreak an attack was made simultaneously by several detachments.

The Indians were taken entirely by surprise. The warriors fled from the village, but took shelter behind trees, logs, and the bank of the stream, and fought with much desperation and courage, but were finally driven off. The village was captured with its contents, including 50 squaws and children who had remained safely in the lodges during the fight. Some 800 ponies were also captured. On questioning the squaws, one of them said that she was a sister of the Cheyenne chief Black Kettle, that it was his village that had been captured, and that several other Indian villages were [Pg 118] located within ten miles—the nearest one being only two miles distant.

Before Custer had time to retreat, hostile Indians—reinforcements from the other villages—arrived in such numbers as to surround the captured village, which Custer and his men occupied; and an attack was begun which continued nearly all day. The Indians were finally driven away. The village and its contents were burned. The captives were allowed to select ponies to ride on, and the balance of the drove were shot. The retreat was begun by a march forward, as if to attack the next village. The Indians fled; and after dark Custer moved rapidly back toward Supply Camp, taking the captives along as prisoners of war.

In this engagement, known as the Battle of the Washita, Major Elliott, Capt. Hamilton, and 19 privates were killed, and three officers and 11 privates wounded. Captains Weir, Benteen, T.W. Custer, and Lieut. Cook, participated in this fight. It was estimated that at least 100 Indians were killed, among whom was the noted chief Black Kettle.

The death of Black Kettle was much regretted by many white people. Gen. Harney said respecting him:—"I have worn the uniform of my country 55 years, and I know that Black Kettle was as good a friend of the United States as I am." Col. A.G. Boone, a member of the recent Indian Commission, who had known Black Kettle for years, said tearfully:—"He was a good man; he was my friend; he was murdered."

Early in Dec., the 7th Cavalry and a Kansas cavalry regiment, accompanied by Gen. Sheridan and staff, again started out to look for Indians. The recent battle-ground [Pg 119] was revisited, and then the force proceeded along the valley of the Washita, finding the sites of several villages which appeared to have been lately and hastily removed. Large numbers of lodge poles, and robes, utensils, and stores were left behind; and a broad trail, leading down the river toward Fort Cobb, 100 miles distant, showed the direction their owners had taken when frightened away from their winter retreat. A pursuit of the trail was commenced, but it soon branched. The troops continued on, and when within 20 miles of Fort Cobb, Indians appeared in front with a flag of truce. They proved to be Kiowas led by Lone Wolf, Satanta, and other chiefs.

A council was held, and both parties agreed to proceed together to Fort Cobb; and the Indians agreed that they would then remain on their reservation. On the way to the fort, many of the Indians slipped away, and as Custer then supposed (erroneously) that Lone Wolf and Satanta had been engaged in the recent battle and might also escape, he placed them under guard and took them to Fort Cobb, where they were held as hostages for the return of the roaming Kiowas, who finally came in on learning that Sheridan had determined to hang their chiefs if they failed to do so.

Soon after this, Little Robe—a Cheyenne chief, and Yellow Bear—a friendly

Arapahoe, were visiting at Fort Cobb, and at Custer's suggestion Sheridan permitted him with a small party to go with these chiefs as a peace ambassador. The mission was successful as far as the Arapahoes were concerned, and as its result the whole tribe returned to their reservation.

The effort to arrange with the Cheyennes proving unavailing, Custer with 800 men started, March, 1869, in pursuit of them. On the 13th of March he arrived in the [Pg 120] vicinity of several Cheyenne villages, one of which belonged to Little Robe. Several councils were held with the chiefs; and it was ascertained that two white women who had been recently captured in Kansas were held as captives in one of the villages. For this reason Custer could not attack the Indians, who were still intractable, and had to continue negotiations with them. They refused to release the women unless a large ransom was paid.

Custer subsequently seized four of the chiefs, and threatened to hang them if the white women were not given up unconditionally. This threat produced the desired effect, and the women were surrendered. Custer then marched to the supply camp, taking with him the captured chiefs, who begged for freedom as the white women had been given up. Their friends also entreated for their release; but Custer assured them that the Washita prisoners and the captive chiefs would not be liberated until the Cheyennes returned to their reservation. This they promised to do, and subsequently kept their word.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MAJOR-GENERAL CUSTER.

(CONTINUED.)

A treaty having been made with the Indians and peace restored, the 7th Cavalry enjoyed a long season of rest. In the autumn of 1870, it was broken into detachments and distributed to different posts. Custer, with two companies, was assigned to a post at Elizabethtown, Ky., 40 miles from Louisville, and in this isolated place he remained two years. During this period of inaction he engaged in literary pursuits and wrote an account of his life on the Plains. He also joined in a buffalo-hunt given on the Plains in honor of the Russian Grand Duke Alexis, and after the hunt he and Mrs. Custer accompanied the Duke in his travels through the Southern States.

In March, 1873, the 7th Cavalry was ordered to Dakota, and in May was encamped at Fort Rice far up the Missouri. Here also were assembled other soldiers, and in July the so-called Yellowstone Expedition, commanded by Gen. D.S. Stanley, started out on its mission, which was to escort and protect the engineers and surveyors of the Northern Pacific Railroad. The march was westward to the Yellowstone and up its valley, accompanied part of the way by steamboats. The country was rough and broken, and the wagon trains were got forward with much difficulty. It was Custer's [Pg 122] custom to go ahead every day with a small party of road-hunters, to pick out and prepare the most suitable road for the train.

On the 4th of Aug., when opposite the mouth of Tongue River, as Custer and his advance party of about 100 men were enjoying a noon-day siesta in a grove on the bank of the river, they were aroused by the firing of the pickets. A few Indians had made a dash to stampede the horses which were grazing near by, and failing in this,

were riding back and forth as if inviting pursuit. The soldiers speedily mounted, and Custer with 20 men followed the Indians, who retreated slowly, keeping out of the reach of shot.

After going nearly two miles the retreating Indians faced about as if to attack, and simultaneously, 300 mounted warriors emerged from a forest and dashed forward. Custer's men immediately dismounted, and while five of them held the horses, the remainder, with breech-loading carbines, awaited the enemy's charge. Several rapid volleys were sufficient to repulse the Indians, and cause them to take shelter in the woods from which they came.

Just then the remainder of Custer's men came up, and the whole force retreated to the resting place they had so lately vacated. The horses were sheltered in the timber, and the men took advantage of a natural terrace, using it as a breastwork. The Indians had followed them closely, and now made persistent but unsuccessful attempts to drive them from their position. Being defeated in this, they next tried to burn them out by setting fire to the grass. After continuing their assault for several hours, the Indians withdrew at the approach of the main column, and Custer and the fresh troops chased them several miles. [Pg 123]

COUNTING HIS COUPS.

The same day, two elderly civilians connected with the expedition were murdered while riding in advance of the main column. Nearly two years later, Charles Reynolds, a scout subsequently killed at the battle of the Little Big Horn, while at Standing Rock Agency, heard an Indian who was "counting his *coups*," or in other words rehearsing his great achievements, boast of killing two white men on the Yellowstone. From his description of the victims and the articles he exhibited, Reynolds knew that he was the murderer of the two men.

The name of this Indian was Rain in the Face. He was subsequently arrested by Captains Yates and Custer, and taken to Fort Lincoln where he was interviewed by Gen. Custer and finally confessed the deed. He was kept a close prisoner in the guardhouse for several months, but managed to escape, and joined Sitting Bull's band. It is thought by some that he was the identical Indian who killed Gen. Custer, and that he did it by way of revenge for his long imprisonment. There seems to be no real foundation for this theory; but the "Revenge of Rain in the Face" will probably go down to posterity as an historical truth, as it has already been immortalized in verse by one of our most gifted poets, who seems, however, to have overlooked the fact that Gen. Custer's body was not mutilated.

A week after the affair on the Yellowstone a large Indian trail was discovered leading up the river, and Custer was sent in pursuit. On arriving near the mouth of Big Horn River, it was discovered that the enemy had crossed the Yellowstone in "bull boats." As Custer had no means of getting across, he camped for the night. Early the next morning he was attacked by several hundred warriors, some of whom had doubtless recrossed the river for that purpose. Sitting Bull was commander of the Indians, and large numbers of old men, squaws, and children were assembled on the high bluffs and mounds along the river to witness the fight. After considerable skirmishing Custer ordered his troops to charge, and as they advanced the Indians fled, and were pursued some distance. [Pg 124]

In these two engagements our loss was four men killed, and two were wounded. Custer's horse was shot under him. There was no further trouble with the Indians, and the expedition returned to Fort Rice about the 1st of October. Later in the autumn, Gen. Custer was assigned to the command of Fort Lincoln, on the Missouri

River, opposite the town of Bismark.

In the summer of 1874, a military expedition to explore the Black Hills was decided on, and Gen. Custer was selected to command it. The column of 1,200 troops, escorting a corps of scientists, etc., started from Fort Lincoln, July 1st, moved southwesterly about 250 miles to the Black Hills, and then explored the region. No trouble was experienced with Indians, and the expedition returned to Fort Lincoln in September.

Mrs. Custer had accompanied her husband to the Plains when he first went thither, and excepting when he was engaged in some active campaign or both were East, she shared with him the hardships, privations, and pleasures of frontier life. Mrs. Champney, speaking of her in the *Independent*, says:—"She followed the general through all his campaigns, her constant aim being to make life pleasant for her husband and for his command. General Custer's officers were remarkably attached to him; to a man they revered and admired his wife. She was with him not only in the idleness of summer camp-life, when the days passed in a *dolce far niente* resembling a holiday picnic; but in ruder and more dangerous enterprises she was, as far as he would permit, his constant companion." [Pg 125]

When Gen. Custer was ordered to Fort Lincoln Mrs. Custer went there with him; that retired post was their home for the remainder of his life, and when he started out on his last campaign she parted with him there.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MAJOR-GENERAL CUSTER.

(CONTINUED.)

When a campaign against the roaming hostile Indians was decided on in 1876, Lieut. Col. Custer was naturally selected as the leader of the Dakota column, which was organized at Fort Lincoln, and mainly composed of his regiment.

About this time a Congressional committee at Washington were investigating the charges against Gen. Belknap, who had recently resigned the office of Secretary of War. Many persons were called to testify; and while Custer was actively engaged in organizing the Sioux expedition, he received a telegraphic summons to appear before the committee.

On the receipt of the summons, Custer telegraphed to Gen. Terry, the Department Commander, informing him of the fact, stating that what he knew as to any charges against the War Department was only from hearsay evidence, and asking his advice as to what he had better do. Terry, who was a lawyer as well as a soldier, in reply informed Custer that his services were indispensable, and that he feared it would delay the expedition if he had to go to Washington. He suggested that if Custer knew nothing of the matter, he might perhaps get excused from going there. [Pg 127]

After hearing from Terry, Custer telegraphed to the chairman of the committee as follows;—

> "While I hold myself in readiness to obey the summons of your committee, I telegraph to state that I am engaged upon an important expedition, intended to operate against the hostile Indians, and I expect to take the field early in April. My presence here is very necessary. In view of this, would it not be satisfactory for you to forward to me such questions as may be necessary, allowing me to return my replies by mail."

As the committee would not consent to the plan proposed, Custer went to Washington, and was detained there on this business about one month. He was severely cross-examined, but the result showed that he knew but little of the matter in controversy. All he could say of his own knowledge was, that a contractor had turned over to him at Fort Lincoln a quantity of grain, which he suspected had been stolen from the Indian Department, as the sacks bore the Indian brand. He had at first refused to receive the grain, and had informed the Department commander of his suspicions. He had received in reply an order to accept the grain; and he believed that the order emanated from the Secretary of War, and so testified before the committee. On returning west, he learned from Gen. Terry that he alone was responsible for the order to receive the grain; and thereupon, Custer telegraphed the fact to Mr. Clymer, and added:—"As I would not knowingly do injustice to any individual, I ask that this telegram may be appended to and made part of my testimony before your committee."

On being discharged by the committee, Custer, for the third time it is said, called at the White House, hoping to remove the wrong impression and misunderstanding as to his action before the committee which, he had learned from private sources, the President had received and still entertained. He did not however succeed in getting an interview, and it is said that Gen. Grant even refused to see him. [Pg 128]

Leaving the White House, Custer proceeded to the office of Gen. Sherman, and learned that the General had gone to New York, but was expected back that evening. Custer then took the train for Chicago, and on arriving there was halted by Gen. Sheridan who had received from Gen. Sherman a telegram dated May 2nd, as follows:—

> "I am this moment advised that General Custer started last night for Saint Paul and Fort Abraham Lincoln. He was not justified in leaving without seeing the President or myself. Please intercept him at Chicago or Saint Paul, and order him to halt and await further orders. Meanwhile let the expedition from Fort Lincoln proceed without him."

Gen. Custer was of course greatly surprised on learning that such a telegram had been received, and he immediately telegraphed to Gen. Sherman a statement of the circumstances under which he left Washington. He reminded the General that at their last interview he had stated that he would start west May 1st, and had been told in reply that it was the best thing he could do; he said further that he had every reason to believe, that in leaving Washington when he did he was acting in accordance with the General's advice and wishes; and in conclusion, he reminded the General of his promise that he should go in command of his regiment, and asked that justice might be done him. Receiving no answer to this message, he again telegraphed to Sherman asking as a favor that he might proceed to Fort Lincoln where his family was. In reply, Sherman telegraphed as follows:— [Pg 129]

> "Before receipt of yours, I had sent orders to Gen. Sheridan, to permit you to go to Fort Lincoln on duty, but the President adheres to his conclusion that you are not to go on the expedition."

Sherman's orders to Sheridan were as follows:—

> "I have received your despatch of to-day, announcing Gen. Custer's arrival. Have just come from the President, who orders that Gen. Custer be allowed to rejoin his post, to remain there on duty, but not to accompany the expedition supposed to be on the point of starting against the hostile Indians, under Gen. Terry."

General Custer accordingly started for Fort Lincoln, and on arriving at Saint Paul, May 6th, he addressed the following letter to President Grant:—

> "To His Excellency the President, through Military Channels:
>
> I have seen your order transmitted through the General of the army, directing that I be not permitted to accompany the expedition about to move against hostile Indians. As my entire regiment forms a part of the proposed expedition, and as I am the senior officer of the regiment on duty in this Department, I respectfully but most earnestly request that while not allowed to go in command of the expedition, I may be permitted to serve with my regiment in the field. I appeal to you as a soldier to spare me the humiliation of seeing my regiment march to meet the enemy and I not to share its dangers."

This appeal to the President was forwarded by Gen. Terry with the following communication:—

> "In forwarding the above, I wish to say expressly, that I have no desire to question the orders of the President, or of my military superiors. Whether Lieut. Col. Custer shall be permitted to accompany my column or not, I shall go in command of it. I do not know the reasons upon which the orders already given rest; but if those reasons do not forbid it, Lieut, Col. Custer's services would be very valuable with his command."

It may be well to state here the probable causes of the unfriendly feeling which Gen. Grant at this period manifested toward one whom he had "endorsed to a high degree" ten years previously. The Congressional committee hitherto mentioned, had

been appointed by the Opposition members of the House, and some of its proceedings had, doubtless, annoyed and vexed the President. Gen. Babcock had been on his staff during the war, and enjoyed his friendship and support even after the damaging disclosures respecting the sale of the post-tradership at a western fort. Attempts had also been made about this time to injure Grant's administration, by seeking to identify it with the frauds which had been discovered, or which were suspected, and he naturally considered those who volunteered information to the committee as unfriendly to himself. [Pg 130]

It was currently reported that Custer telegraphed to the committee's chairman, that an investigation into the post-traderships upon the Upper Missouri would reveal a state of things quite as bad as at Fort Sill; and that in consequence of this communication he was summoned before the committee.

But whatever the causes of Gen. Grant's unfriendliness, or the cruelty charged upon him for showing his displeasure as he did, the result of Gen. Custer's appeal was creditable to the President. Custer resumed his position as Terry's trusted coadjutor in fitting out the expedition, and finally marched from Fort Lincoln as commander of his regiment. It was no disgrace to him that Terry accompanied the column, and the best feeling always existed between the two officers. The junction with the Montana troops was contemplated at the time, and their commander, Col. Gibbon, would have ranked Lieut. Col. Custer when their forces united. Some commanding general had usually accompanied previous expeditions into the Indian country, and it seems probable that Gen. Terry would have participated in the campaign under any circumstances. Besides, it does not appear from Custer's despatch to Sheridan, that he had been promised more than the command of his regiment. [Pg 131]

The history of the campaign, and the story of the disastrous battle in which Gen. Custer lost his life have been given in preceding chapters. His action in attacking the Indians before the arrival of Gibbon's troops has been the subject of controversy, and by some few even his motives have been impugned. The following paragraphs relative thereto are from the editorial columns of the *Army and Navy Journal*:—

> "It was not in Terry's instructions, and it clearly was not in his mind, that Custer, if he came "in contact with the enemy," should defer fighting him until the infantry came up. * * * There could be no justification whatever for any plan of operations which made an attack dependent upon a junction between Custer and Gibbon, after three or four days' march from different points.
>
> "It has been asserted that, smarting under the wounds which preceding events had inflicted upon his pride, Custer dashed recklessly into this affair for the purpose of eclipsing his superior officers in the same field, regardless of cost or consequences. This, it seems to us, is going much too far. Custer was doubtless glad of the opportunity to fight the battle alone, and was stimulated by the anticipation of a victory which, illuminating his already brilliant career, would make him outshine those put on duty over him in this campaign. But his management of the affair was probably just about what it would have been under the same circumstances, if he had had no grievance. His great mistake was in acting in mingled ignorance of, and contempt for his enemy. He regarded attack and victory in this instance as synonymous terms, the only point being to prevent the escape of the foe. Under this fatal delusion he opened the engagement, with his command divided into four parts, with no certainty of co-operation or support between any two of them. Neither ambition, nor wounded vanity, prompted these vicious and fatal dispositions, nor were they due to lack of knowledge of the principles of his profession."

CHAPTER XIX.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF MAJOR-GENERAL CUSTER.

(CONCLUDED.)

As the foregoing biography of Gen. Custer has been confined chiefly to his military career, it may be well in conclusion to give some account of his personal characteristics; and this can be best done in the language of those who knew him well. A gentleman who accompanied Gen. Custer on the Yellowstone and Black Hills expeditions, contributed to the *New York Tribune* the following:—

> "Gen. Custer was a born cavalryman. He was never more in his element than when mounted on Dandy, his favorite horse, and riding at the head of his regiment. He once said to me, 'I would rather be a private in the cavalry than a line officer in the infantry.' He was the personification of bravery and dash. If he had only added discretion to his valor he would have been a perfect soldier. His impetuosity very often ran away with his judgment. He was impatient of control. He liked to act independently of others, and take all the risk and all the glory to himself. He frequently got himself into trouble by assuming more authority than really belonged to his rank. It was on the Yellowstone expedition where he came into collision with Gen. Stanley, his superior officer, and was placed under arrest and compelled to ride at the rear of his column for two or three days, until Gen. Rosser, who fought against

Custer in the Shenandoah Valley during the war but was then acting as engineer of the Northern Pacific Railroad, succeeded in effecting a reconciliation. Custer and Stanley afterward got on very well, and perhaps the quarrel would never have [Pg 133] occurred if the two generals had been left alone to themselves without the intervention of camp gossips, who sought to foster the traditional jealousy between infantry and cavalry. For Stanley was the soul of generosity, and Custer did not really mean to be arrogant; but from the time when he entered West Point to the day when he fell on the Big Horn, he was accustomed to take just as much liberty as he was entitled to.

"For this reason, Custer worked most easily and effectively when under general orders, when not hampered by special instructions, or his success made dependent on anybody else. Gen. Terry understood his man when, in the order directing him to march up the Rosebud, he very liberally said: 'The Department Commander places too much confidence in your zeal, energy, and ability to wish to impose upon you precise orders which might hamper your action when nearly in contact with the enemy.' But Gen. Terry did not understand Custer if he thought he would wait for Gibbon's support before attacking an Indian camp. Undoubtedly he ought to have done this; but with his native impetuosity, his reckless daring, his confidence in his own regiment, which had never failed him, and his love of public approval, Custer could no more help charging this Indian camp, than he could help charging just so many buffaloes. He had never learned to spell the word 'defeat;' he knew nothing but success, and if he had met the Indians on the open plains, success would undoubtedly have been his; for no body of Indians could stand the charge of the 7th Cavalry when it swept over the Plains like a whirlwind. But in the Mauvaises Terres and the narrow valley of the Big Horn he did it at a fearful risk.

"With all his bravery and self-reliance, his love of independent action, Custer was more dependent than most men on the kind approval of his fellows. He was even vain; he loved display in dress and in action. He would pay $40 for a pair of troop boots to wear on parade, and have everything else in keeping. On the Yellowstone expedition he wore a bright red shirt, which made him the best mark for a rifle of any man in the regiment. I remonstrated with him for this reckless exposure, but found an appeal to his wife more effectual, and on the next campaign he wore a buckskin suit. He formerly wore his hair very long, letting it fall in a heavy mass upon his shoulders, but [Pg 134] cut it off before going out on the Black Hills, producing quite a change in his appearance. But if vain and ambitious, Custer had none of those great vices which are so common and so distressing in the army. He never touched liquor in any form; he did not smoke, or chew, or gamble. He was a man of great energy and remarkable endurance. He could outride almost any man in his regiment, I believe, if it were put to a test. When he set out to reach a certain point at a certain time, you could be sure that he would be there if he killed every horse in the command. He was sometimes too severe in forcing marches, but he never seemed to get tired himself, and he never expected his men to be so. In cutting our way through the forests of the Black Hills, I have often seen him take an ax and work as hard as any of the pioneers. He was never idle when he had a pretext for doing anything. Whatever he did he did thoroughly. He would overshoot the mark, but never fall short. He fretted in garrison sometimes, because it was too inactive; but he found an outlet here for his energies in writing articles for the press.

"He had a remarkable memory. He could recall in its proper order every detail of any action, no matter how remote, of which he was a participant. He was rather verbose in writing, and had no gifts as a speaker; but his writings interested the masses from their close attention to details, and from his facility with the pen as with the sword in bringing a thing to a climax. As he was apt to overdo in action, so he was apt to exaggerate in statement, not from any wilful disregard of the truth, but because he saw things bigger than they really were. He did not distort the truth; he magnified it. He was a natural optimist. He took rose-colored views of everything, even of the miserable lands of the Northern Pacific Railroad. He had a historical memory, but not a historical mind. He was no philosopher; he could reel off facts from his mind better than he could analyze or mass them. He was not a student, nor a deep thinker. He loved to take part in events rather than to brood over them. He was fond of fun, genial and pleasant in his manner; a loving and devoted husband. It was my privilege to spend two weeks in his family at one time, and I know how happy he was in his social relations."

The following rambling remarks are accredited to a general, whose name is not given:—

"The truth about Custer is, that he was a pet soldier, who had risen not above his [Pg 135] merit, but higher than men of equal merit. He fought with Phil Sheridan, and through the patronage of Sheridan he rose; but while Sheridan liked his valor and dash he never trusted his judgment. He was to Sheridan what Murat was to Napoleon. While Sheridan is always cool, Custer was always aflame. Rising to high command early in life, he lost the repose necessary to success in high command. * * * Then Custer must rush into politics, and went swinging around the circle with Johnson. He wanted to be a statesman, and but for Sheridan's influence with Grant, the republicans would have thrown him; but you see we all liked Custer, and did not mind his little freaks in that way any more than we would have minded temper in a woman. Sheridan, to keep Custer in his place, kept him out on the Plains at work. He gave him a fine command—one of the best cavalry regiments in the service. The colonel, Sturgis, was allowed to bask in the sunshine in a large city, while Custer was the real commander. In this service Custer did well, and vindicated the partiality of Sheridan as well as the kind feelings of his friends. * * * The old spirit which sent Custer swinging around the circle revived in him. He came East and took a prominent part in reforming the army.

This made feeling, and drew upon Custer the anger of the inside forces of the administration.

"Then he must write his war memoirs. Well, in these memoirs he began to write recklessly about the army. He took to praising McClellan as the greatest man of the war, and, coming as it did when the democrats began to look lively, it annoyed the administration. Grant grew so much annoyed that even Sheridan could do no good, and Custer was disgraced. Technically it was not a disgrace. All that Grant did was to put Terry, a general, over Custer, a lieutenant-colonel, who had his regiment all the same; but all things considered, it was a disgrace."

The following is from an article by Gen. A.B. Nettleton, published in the *Philadelphia Times*:—

"It must be remembered that in fighting with cavalry, which was Custer's forte, instantaneous quickness of eye—that is, the lightning-like formation and execution of successive correct judgments on a rapidly-shifting situation—is the first thing, and the second is the power of inspiring the troopers with that impetuous yet intelligent ardor with which a mounted brigade becomes a thunderbolt, and without which it remains a [Pg 136] useless mass of horses and riders. These qualities Gen. Custer seemed to me to manifest, throughout the hard fighting of the last year of the war, to a degree that was simply astounding, and in a manner that marked him as one of the few really great cavalry commanders developed by the wars of the present century. Of fear, in the sense of dread of death or of bodily harm, he was absolutely destitute, yet his love of life and family and home was keen and constant, leaving no room in his nature for desperation, recklessness, or conscious rashness. In handling his division under Sheridan's general oversight, he seemed to act always on the belief that in campaigning with cavalry, when a certain work must be done, audacity is the truest caution. In action, when all was going well and success was only a question of time or of steady 'pounding,' Gen. Custer did not unnecessarily expose himself, but until the tide of battle had been turned in the right direction, and especially when disaster threatened, the foremost point in our division's line was almost invariably marked by the presence of Custer, his waving division tri-color and his plucky staff.

"A major-general of wide and splendid fame at twenty-five, and now slain at thirty-six, the gallant Custer had already lived long if life be measured by illustrious deeds."

The following is from a sketch of Gen. Custer published in the *Army and Navy Journal*:—

"Custer was passionately addicted to active and exciting sports as the turf and hunting. He was a splendid horseman and a lover of the horse; he attended many American race-meetings and ran his own horses several times in the West. His greyhounds and staghounds went with him at the head of his regiment, to be let slip at antelope or buffalo. With rifle or shotgun he was equally expert, and had killed his grizzly bear in the most approved fashion. * * * Bold to rashness; feverish in camp, but cool in action; with the personal vanity of a carpet knight, and the endurance and insensibility to fatigue of the hardiest and boldest rough rider; a prince of scouts; a chief of guides, threading a trackless prairie with unerring eye of a native and the precision of the needle to the star; by no means a martinet, his men were led by the golden chain of love, admiration and confidence. He had the proverbial assurance of a hussar, but his personal appearance varied with occasion. During the war he was [Pg 137] 'Custer of the golden locks, his broad sombrero turned up from his hard-bronzed face, the ends of his crimson cravat floating over his shoulder, gold galore spangling his jacket sleeves, a pistol in his boot, jangling spurs on his heels, and a ponderous claymore swinging at his side.' And long after, when he roamed a great Indian fighter on the Plains, the portrait was only slightly changed. The cavalry jacket was exchanged for the full suit of buckskin, beautifully embroidered by Indian maidens; across his saddle rested a modern sporting rifle, and at his horse's feet demurely walked hounds of unmixed breed. Again, within a few months, he appears in private society as an honored guest; scrupulously avoiding anything like display, but in a quiet conventional suit of blue, with the 'golden locks' closely shorn, and the bronzed face pale from recent indisposition, he moves almost unnoticed in the throng."

The faithful correspondent who perished with Gen. Custer on the Little Big Horn portrayed him thus:—

"A man of strong impulses, of great hearted friendships and bitter enmities; of quick, nervous temperament, undaunted courage, will, and determination; a man possessing electric mental capacity, and of iron frame and constitution; a brave, faithful, gallant soldier, who has warm friends and bitter enemies; the hardest rider, the greatest pusher; with the most untiring vigilance overcoming seeming impossibilities, and with an ambition to succeed in all things he undertakes; a man to do right, as he construes right, in every case; one respected and beloved by his followers, who would freely follow him into the 'jaws of hell.'"

Gen. Custer's last battle "will stand in history as one of the most heroic engagements ever fought, and his name will be respected so long as chivalry is applauded and civilization battles against barbarism."

CHAPTER XX.

In 1875, the Black Hills country had acquired a white population and an importance which rendered its possession and control by the Government desirable and necessary; and an attempt was made to treat with the Indians for its purchase, but without success.

In 1876, Congress expressed its determination to appropriate nothing more for the subsistence of the Sioux Indians unless they made certain concessions, including the surrender of the Black Hills, and entered into some agreement calculated to enable them to become self-supporting. Geo. W. Manypenny, H. C. Bullis, Newton Edmunds, Rt. Rev. H.B. Whipple, A.G. Boone, A.S. Gaylord, J.W. Daniels, and Gen. H.H. Sibley, were appointed commissioners to negotiate for the concessions demanded. The following is an extract from their instructions under which they acted:—

> "The President is strongly impressed with the belief that the agreement which shall be best calculated to enable the Indians to become self-supporting is one which shall provide for their removal, at as early a day as possible, to the Indian Territory. For the past three years they have been kept from starvation by large appropriations for their subsistence. These appropriations have been a matter not of obligation but of charity, and the Indians should be made to understand distinctly that they can hope for continued appropriations only by full submission to the authority and wishes of the Government, and upon full evidence of their disposition to undertake, in earnest, measures for their own advancement and support."

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The first council was held Sept. 7th, at Red Cloud agency, with chiefs and headmen representing 4,901 Indians then at the agency. Red Cloud and other chiefs met the commissioners with warm welcomes, and said with deep earnestness:—"We are glad to see you; you have come to save us from death." The conditions required by Congress were then submitted to the Indians, with the assurance that the commissioners had no authority to change them in any particular; but that they were authorized to devise a plan to save their people from death and lead them to civilization. The plan decided on was then carefully explained and interpreted, and a copy of the agreement given to the Indians to take to their own council. Other councils were held Sept. 19th and 20th, and after mutual explanations the agreement was signed.

Subsequently, the commissioners visited Spotted Tail agency, Standing Rock agency, Cheyenne River agency, Crow Creek agency, Lower Brule agency, and Santee agency. At all of these agencies the agreement was made plain to the Indians, and after due deliberation and considerable discussion, duly signed. The following are extracts from the report of the commissioners:—

> "While the Indians received us as friends, and listened with kind attention to our propositions, we were painfully impressed with their lack of confidence in the pledges of the Government. At times they told their story of wrongs with such impassioned earnestness that our cheeks crimsoned with shame. In their speeches, the recital of the wrongs which their people had suffered at the hands of the whites, the arraignment of the Government for gross acts of injustice and fraud, the description of treaties made only to be broken, the doubts and distrusts of present professions of friendship and good-will, were portrayed in colors so vivid and language so terse, that admiration and surprise would have kept us silent had not shame and humiliation done so. Said a chief to a member of our commission:—'I am glad to see you, you are our friends, but I hear that you have come to move us. Tell your people that since the Great Father promised that we should never be removed we have been moved five times.' He added, with bitter irony, 'I think you had better put the Indians on wheels so you can run them about wherever you wish.'

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> "The present condition of the Sioux Indians is such as to awaken the deepest sympathy. They were our friends. If many of this powerful tribe have been changed to relentless foes, we must not forget that it is the simple outcome of our own Indian training-school. Generals Sherman, Harney, Terry, and others, use these words:—
>
> 'The moment the war of the rebellion was over, thousands of our people turned their attention toward the treasures of Montana. The Indian was forgotten. It did not occur to any man that this poor, despised red man was the original discoverer, and sole occupant for many centuries, of every mountain seamed with quartz and every stream whose yellow sand glittered in the noonday sun. He asked to retain only a secluded spot where the buffalo and elk could live, and that spot he would make his home. The truth is, no place was left for him. If the lands of the white men are taken, civilization justifies him in resisting the invader. Civilization does more than this—it brands him as a coward and a slave if he submits to the wrong. If the savage resists, civilization, with the Ten Commandments in one hand and the sword in the other, demands his immediate extermination. That he goes to war is not astonishing. He is often compelled to do so. Wrongs are borne by him in silence that never fail to drive civilized men to deeds of violence. * * * But it is said that our wars with them have been almost constant. Have we been uniformly unjust? We answer unhesitatingly, 'yes.'"
>
> "General Stanley in 1870 writes from Dakota, that he is 'ashamed to appear any longer in the presence of the chiefs of the different tribes of the Sioux, who inquire why we do not do as we promised, and in their vigorous language aver that we have lied.' Sitting Bull, who had refused to come under treaty relations with the

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Government, based his refusal in these words, sent to the commission of which Assistant Secretary Cowen was chairman: 'Whenever you have found a white man who will tell the truth, you may return, and I shall be glad to see you.'"

"It has been claimed that all Indians found outside of their reservation shall be regarded as hostile. Gen. Sheridan, June 29th, 1869, says in an official order, that all Indians outside the well-defined limits of the reservation are under the original and exclusive jurisdiction of the military authority, *and as a rule will be considered hostile*. This order is the more surprising to us when we remember that the treaty made by General Sherman and others expressly provided that these Indians might hunt upon the unceded territory; and we find that so late as its last session Congress appropriated $200,000 to be used in part for the payment of the seventh of thirty installments '*for Indians roaming*.' We repeat that, under this treaty, it is expressly provided that the Indians may hunt in the unceded territory north and west of the Sioux reservation, and until last year they had the right to hunt in Western Nebraska. We believe that our failure to recognize this right has led to many conflicts between the citizens and army of the United States and the Indians."

"In 1874, the late lamented Gen. Custer made an expedition to the Black Hills. It was done against the protest of the Indians and their friends, and in plain, direct violation of the treaty. Gold was discovered, white men flocked to the El Dorado. Notwithstanding the gross violation of the treaty, no open war ensued. If our own people had a sad story of wrongs suffered from the Indians, we must not forget that the Indians, who own no telegraph-lines, who have no press and no reporters, claimed that they, too, had been the victims of lawless violence, and had a country of untold value wrested from them by force.

"The charge is made that the agency Indians are hostile, and that they have furnished ammunition and supplies to the Indians with Sitting Bull. There is water-navigation for 3,000 miles through this territory, and an unguarded border of several hundred miles along the Canadian frontier. So long as the Indians will sell buffalo-robes at a low price and pay two prices for guns, the greed of white men will furnish them. It is gross injustice to the agents and the Interior Department to accuse them of furnishing arms [Pg 142] and ammunition for Indians to fight our army and murder our citizens.

"Of the results of this year's war we have no wish to speak. It is a heart-rending record of the slaughter of many of the bravest of our army. It has not only carried desolation and woe to hundreds of our own hearthstones, but has added to the cup of anguish which we have pressed to the lips of the Indian. We fear that when others shall examine it in the light of history, they will repeat the words of the officers who penned the report of 1868:—'The results of the year's campaign satisfied all reasonable men that the war was useless and expensive.'

"We hardly know how to frame in words the feelings of shame and sorrow which fill our hearts as we recall the long record of the broken faith of our Government. It is made more sad, in that the rejoicings of our centennial year are mingled with the wail of sorrow of widows and orphans made by a needless Indian war, and that our Government has expended more money in this war than all the religious bodies of our country have spent in Indian missions since our existence as a nation.

"After long and careful examination we have no hesitation in recommending that it is wise to continue the humane policy inaugurated by President Grant. The great obstacle to its complete success is that no change has been made in the laws for the care of Indians. The Indian is left without the protection of law in person, or property, or life. He has no personal rights. He has no redress for wrongs inflicted by lawless violence. He may see his crops destroyed, his wife or child killed. His only redress is personal revenge. * * * In the Indian's wild state he has a rude government of chiefs and headmen, which is advisory in its character. When located upon reservations under the charge of a United States agent, this government is destroyed, and we give him nothing in its place.

"We are aware that many of our people think that the only solution of the Indian problem is in their extermination. We would remind such persons that there is only One who can exterminate. There are too many graves within our borders over which the grass has hardly grown, for us to forget that God is just. The Indian is a savage, but he is also a man. He is one of the few savage men who clearly recognize the existence of a Great Spirit. He believes in the immortality of the soul. He has a [Pg 143] passionate love for his children. He loves his country. He will gladly die for his tribe. Unless we deny all revealed religion, we must admit that he has the right to share in all the benefits of divine revelation. He is capable of civilization. Amid all the obstacles, the wrongs, and evils of our Indian policy, there are no missions which show richer rewards. Thousands of this poor race, who were once as poor and degraded as the wild Sioux, are to-day civilized men, living by the cultivation of the soil, and sharing with us in those blessings which give to men home, country, and freedom. There is no reason why these men may not also be led out of darkness to light."

The following is a synopsis of the arrangement agreed on by the commissioners and Indians:—

The Sioux surrender all claim to so much of their reservation as lies west of the 103d meridian of longitude, and to so much of it as lies between the North and South Forks of the Cheyenne River east of said meridian; also all claim to any country lying outside of their reservation. Cannon Ball River and its south branch are to be the northern boundary of the reservation. Three wagon or other roads may be maintained across the reservation from the Missouri River to the Black Hills. All subsistence and

supplies which may be hereafter provided, are to be delivered on or near the Missouri River. A delegation of chiefs and leading men from each band shall visit the Indian Territory, with a view to selecting therein a permanent home for the Indians. If such delegation shall make a selection satisfactory to the Indians they represent and to the United States, then the Indians are to remove to the selected country within one year, select allotments as soon as possible afterwards, and use their best efforts to cultivate the same. They are in all things to submit themselves to such beneficent plans as the Government may provide for them in the selection of a permanent home where they may live like white men.

The United States agree to furnish subsistence to the Sioux until such time as they shall become self-supporting—rations to be issued to heads of families; and in case the Indians are located on lands suitable for cultivation, and educational facilities are afforded by the Government, the issue of rations is to be conditioned on the performance of labor by the Indians and the attendance of their children at school. Assistance in the way of schools and instruction in the agricultural and mechanical arts, as provided by the treaty of 1868, is guaranteed; and the building of comfortable houses on allotments in severalty is provided for. The Sioux are declared amenable to the laws of the United States; and Congress shall secure to them an orderly government and protect individual property, person, and life. The agreement not to be binding on either party till approved by Congress and the President.

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With the exception of the Santees, the Indians on the Missouri River objected to visiting the Indian Territory, and were exempted from that part of the agreement by a supplementary clause. A delegation of 90 Indians from the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies visited the Indian Territory in October as provided in the agreement. The following is from the report of Commissioners Boone and Daniels who accompanied the delegation:—

"While travelling through the Territory, Spotted Tail took special pains to inform us that he was not pleased with anything that came within his observation, and his part of the delegation, with but few exceptions, were not disposed to express themselves in any other way. Many of the Red Cloud party were well pleased. Their chief said 'his Great Father asked him to go and find a place where his children could live by cultivating the land. This was the country, and he should go back and tell his people so.' The manual-labor school of 120 scholars at the Cheyenne and Arapahoe agency, was of more interest to them and gave them more pleasure than anything else seen on the journey. They manifested much interest in the progress of civilization among the Sac and Fox, and when passing the Creek country, the delegation was received by these tribes with generous hospitality and a hearty welcome. When we were at Okmulgee, the capital of the Creek Nation, they were invited to the council-house by the Creek chief, where he made a very friendly speech to them. The following is a copy thereof:—

"To the Sioux, my brethren:—I am well pleased to see you here in the Mus-koke Nation, brethren of the same race as ourselves. I was told a long time ago of my red brethren, the Sioux, that were living in the far Northwest. I had heard of the name of your tribe and of many of your leading chiefs. I have heard of your great men, great in war, and great in council. I have heard of your trouble on account of the intrusion of the white men on your reservation in search of gold. I have heard that the United States Government had determined to remove you from your present home, and, perhaps it might be, to this Indian Territory, to the west of us. When I heard that you might possibly come to this Territory, which has been 'set apart for the home of the Indians forever,' I was glad. I would like to have all our red brethren settled in this Territory, as we have provided in our treaty. We, the Creeks and Cherokees, have the same kind of title and patent for our lands from the United States, which guarantees this Territory to us for a home, under our own form of government, by people of our own race, as long as 'grass grows and water runs.' And I think, therefore, we shall live forever on our lands. I should like—and I express the wish of our people—that every Indian tribe should come here and settle on these lands, that this Territory may become filled up with Indians, to the exclusion of others who may be inimical to our race and interests. We believe our right to our soil and our government, which is best suited to our peculiar necessities, would be safer if all our race were united together here. This is my earnest wish. Then I think the rising generation could be educated and civilized, and, what is still better, christianized, which, I believe, would be the greatest benefit of all. This would be to our mutual benefit and good. I know I express the minds of our people when I give you this welcome to our life of a higher civilization, which is better than the old life so long led by our race in the past."

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At the councils held at the different agencies, the chiefs and principal men made numerous speeches, which conveyed a good idea of Indian views and feelings, and were often able and eloquent. The balance of this chapter will be filled up with extracts from some of these speeches.

Red Cloud Agency. FAST BEAR:—My good friends, you have come here to ask me for something, and I have come here to-day to answer. You ask me to give up the mountains that are to the north of us, and I answer yes to that question. I give them up. You are here also to ask me to take a journey to look at a country, and I also answer yes to that question. I consent for my young men to go down there and see that country; but they must look at it in silence, and come back in silence. When they have seen the country I will consider it. If it is good I will consider it so; if bad I will consider that it is bad. Do you understand, my friends, what I last said to you? We do not agree to go there to live before we have seen the country.

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YOUNG-MAN-AFRAID-OF-HIS-HORSE:—My father shook hands with the Dakotas peacefully on the Platte River. I have been brought up here from a boy until I got to be a chief. The soldiers have no business in this country at all. I wish to tell you plainly that I have been very much ashamed ever since the soldiers came here. This is my country, and I have remained here with my women and children eating such things as the Great Father has sent us. I am going to ask the Great Father for a great many things, things that will make me rich. I am going to ask for so much that I am afraid the Great Father will not consent to give it to me. I want you to tell the Great Father that I, and all the men like me, and the children, are going to ask him for a great many things, and we expect to have food, and blankets to wear as long as we live.

BLACK COAL:—This place here is a place of peace, where we and our people have lived together happily, and behaved ourselves, and we do not understand why so many soldiers have come here among us. We have never had any trouble and have behaved ourselves, and wish to have the soldiers sent away as soon as possible, and leave us in peace. The people that live here have both minds and hearts and good sense, but it seems as if the Great Father all at once thought differently, and speaks of us as people that are very bad.

RED CLOUD:—The commissioners have both brains and hearts. The Great Father has sent you here to visit me and my people, and I want that you should help us. We see a great many soldiers here in our country. We do not like to see them here. I want you to have pity upon us, and have them all taken away. I understand all the ways of the whites. I know that everything that has been said has been written down, and I should like to have a fair copy of that made and given to me. [Pg 147]

LITTLE WOUND:—I always considered that when the Great Father borrowed the country for the overland road that he made an arrangement with us that was to last fifty years as payment for that privilege, and yesterday another arrangement was mentioned concerning the Black Hills, and the words that I heard from the Great Father and from the commissioners from the Great Council made me cry. The country upon which I am standing is the country upon which I was born, and upon which I heard that it was the wish of the Great Father and of the Great Council that I should be like a man without a country. I shed tears. I wish that the chief men among you that have come here to see me would help me, and would change those things that do not suit me.

Spotted Tail Agency. SPOTTED TAIL:—My friends that have come here to see me; you have brought to us words from the Great Father at Washington, and I have considered them now for seven days, and have made up my mind. This is the fifth time that you have come. At the time of the first treaty that was made on Horse Creek—the one we call the "great treaty"—there was provision made to borrow the overland road of the Indians, and promises made at the time of the treaty, though I was a boy at the time; they told me it was to last fifty years. These promises have not been kept. All the words have proved to be false. The next conference was the one held with Gen. Manydear, when there were no promises made in particular, nor for any amount to be given to us, but we had a conference with him and made friends and shook hands. Then after that there was a treaty made by Gen. Sherman. He told us we should have annuities and goods from that treaty for thirty-five years. He said this, but yet he didn't tell the truth. He told me the country was mine, and that I should select any place I wished for my reservation and live in it. My friends, I will show you well his words to-day. * * * I see that my friends before me are men of age and dignity. I think that each of you have selected somewhere a good piece of land for himself, with the intention of living on it, that he may there raise up his children. My people, that you see here before you, are not different; they also live upon the earth and upon the things that come to them from above.

My friends, this seems to me to be a very hard day, and we have come upon very difficult times. This war did not spring up here in our land; this war was brought upon us by the children of the Great Father who came to take our land from us without price, and who, in our land, do a great many evil things. We have a store-house to hold our provisions the Great Father sends us, but he sends very little provisions to put in our store-house. When our people become displeased with their provisions and have gone north to hunt in order that they might live, the Great Father's children are fighting them. It has been our wish to live in our country peaceably, but the Great Father has filled it with soldiers who think only of our death. It seems to me there is a better way than this. When people come to trouble, it is better for both parties to come together without arms and talk it over and find some peaceful way to settle it. My friends, you have come to me to-day, and mentioned two countries to me. One of them I know of old—the Missouri River. It is not possible for me to go there. When I was there before we had a great deal of trouble. I left also 100 of my people buried there. The other country you have mentioned is one I have never seen since I was born, but I agree to go and look at it. When men have a difficult business to settle it is not possible it should be well settled in one day; it takes at least twelve months to consider it. [Pg 148]

SPOTTED TAIL:—(*Second Council.*) This war has come from robbery—from the stealing of our land. My friends, I wish to tell the Great Father "Let us consider this matter." There are on both sides a great many widows and a great many orphans. Let us consider who is to take care of these. This matter has not been begun with judgment; and I think it is displeasing to the Great Spirit. The Great Father sent you out here to buy our land and we have agreed together to that, but with one understanding:—That it shall be the end, also, of this war. We have always been peaceful friends of the Great Father, and shall remain at peace with him; but all at once a whirlwind has passed over our land, and the ammunition has been locked up so that we cannot get it to hunt game to live upon. Now we shake hands and make peace and wish it to be unlocked so we can buy ammunition. You know this trouble does not please the Great

Spirit, and I want you to help me to blot it out.

BAPTISTE GOOD:—You have come here with considerations that will make my people live, and my heart is glad. When Gen. Sherman came to make a treaty with my people, I was also glad. That was like the birth of a child. I wish you would tell the Great [Pg 149] Father we need implements to work with, and wagons for two horses. I have worn out my fingers working without implements. I have planted corn, and I am happy to say it has grown up and produced fruit. The white minister has come here to teach me, but I don't think it is done properly. I would like to have some female ministers come dressed in black to receive the girls in one house and teach them, and have white male ministers in black hat and coat to teach the boys in another house separately.

BLUE TEETH:—Just such men as you came to make the treaty with me. They showed me a road to walk in, and I showed my people and advised them according to their words, and they were glad. But the things they promised me didn't turn out as they promised them. I am the man that heard the promises made. Spotted Tail told you about that yesterday, according to my direction, but I was hiding myself. I want the man pointed out that is going to talk to the Great Father. [Judge Gaylord is pointed out.] You see that pipe: take it, [handing to Judge Gaylord a pipe and tobacco-pouch.] The Great Spirit gave me that pipe. He told me to point it to my mother, the earth, when I prayed. I wish you to take it to the Great Father at Washington, and tell him a man that made a speech here presented it to him, and ask him to be merciful to him and help him to live. Tell him this is my country, and for him to have pity upon me and not move me away from it. I want to live here always.

Standing Rock Agency. JOHN GRASS:—Look well at me with both eyes and listen to me with both ears. I have considered the words you have brought me, and I am ready to answer you. The chiefs you see here have all come to the same conclusion. You have brought words to the chiefs here that will bring life to their children; that will make their children live; they answer *how* [signifying their approval] to that. And now since they have ceded their country to you, they want to tell you of certain things that they shall want in the future.

RUNNING ANTELOPE:—When people shake hands and talk, they talk in earnest. I want you to look on this man Kill Eagle, with his people who are prisoners here. He is one of us and is our kindred. Kindred living with each other love each other, and when they get into trouble they help each other out, and we look on these Indians the same as white. He went out to the hostile camp, held his gun, witnessed a fight, and came [Pg 150] back. I want before the sun sets to see these men released. I am an old man, and I ask these things as a favor.

In regard to this store. I have been to see the Great Father, and the white people are wealthy. Even they have stores one right against the other, touching each other. When a man goes in a store and finds something he wants and cannot obtain it as cheaply as he desires, he goes into another, and so on until he gets what he wants and at the proper price. We want to do so here.

TWO BEARS:—Hail Great Spirit, and hail my friends who I see here, and hail Great Father! My heart is this day made glad by seeing you here. You prayed to the Great Spirit and that made our hearts glad. I was the chief owner of this country, but the Great Father turned it over to his young men. This was a hard thing for him to do to me; now that he proposes to pay me for it I am very glad. I am of the fifth generation of the Sioux Indians, and the sixth generation is growing up around me. I want the Government to provide for the same number of generations in the future. I am making this trade with the Great Father, and I am not a white man and am not able to live like a white man. They eat but little, but I am not able to get along with a little yet. The Great Spirit fed me, and fed me in large quantities. I eat all day, and eating great quantities has become a habit with me. I am afraid of frightful things; I am afraid of bad things; I am afraid of a battle. I like good things, and straightforward dealings. For two winters I was starving and have eaten a great number of my horses and dogs. In consequence of this starvation many of our people fled from the agency in search of food, and while they were out one of them got into trouble. [referring to Kill Eagle.]

MAD BEAR:—I am an Indian, a poor, miserable Indian, but if I should do as has been done by us, the Great Spirit would dislike, and hate me, and for that reason I cannot do these things. Men, civilians, that we have had for agents would steal our food, steal things that were sent to us. It is the fault of the white men that this is done. They select men that belong to the ring. When one agent is removed they select his friend to succeed him, and so the stealing goes on. The matter of their traders alone is enough to drive the Indians hostile. It would drive a white man hostile to be treated as we are treated, and to be charged prices as our traders charge us for goods. If an Indian succeeds in getting a dollar he takes it to the store to trade, and what he [Pg 151] receives in return for it amounts to probably half a dime. We want the monopoly of trading stores stopped. The work, the labor, everything is monopolized by white men, who have everything their own way. It is hard to be an Indian chief. Our young men do not listen to us—they will not mind us.

FOOL DOG:—The Great Spirit created these men and they expect to raise children after them. Generations are not to stop here, they are still to go on living, and we look to you for help and assistance. I am an Indian, and am looked on by the whites as a foolish man; but it must be because I follow the advice of the white man.

LONG SOLDIER:—The Great Spirit called me forth to be a chief, and this day I say *how* to you. The Great Father has asked me for a portion of my country and has made me an offer in return for it. I am very glad to get what has been offered to me, and I therefore say *how* to your proposition. I am a very suspicious man and always suspect people of some evil designs when they talk to me, and therefore remain at home. My

father, who has instructed me to be a friend of the whites, is still living, and I want him to share in the benefits that arise from the sale of the Black Hills.

Two Bears:—My friends, to-day we have talked together with smiles on our faces, and we are going to sign this paper with the understanding that everything in it is true, and that we are not deceiving each other. My children are very poor and very ignorant, and they don't know anything about weights and measures, and if you are going to issue my rations by weight I want you to give good measure. In signing this agreement I don't sign it myself; I have a young man who is my hope for the future. Although I touch the pen myself, I touch it for my son, who is to be my successor.

Drag Wood:—I am an old man and my bones are getting sore, and I want my son to sign this agreement with me.

Wolf Necklace:—I never want to leave this country; all my relatives are lying here in the ground, and when I fall to pieces I am going to fall to pieces here.

Cheyenne River Agency. Long Mandan:—I am glad of one thing; the Great Father knows that this is my country, and before he takes it from me he is going to ask my permission. Our people are poor, they have nothing in their lodges, and if you will visit [Pg 152] them you would feel disposed to bring many things to them to-day. My friends, when I went to Washington I went into your money-house, and I had some young men with me, but none of them took any money out of that house while I was with them. At the same time, when your Great Father's people come into my country, they go into my money-house and take money out. More than that, they commit depredations on us; and stole fifty head of horses and took them away from me. If the Great Father was not a great man and was not a man that had great power and a good man, I should have been mad; but he is a great man and a good man, and that is the reason that I have not been offended at him. I would much rather have gone to Washington with my people and have signed this treaty there. I do not want to spend a great deal of money for the Great Father, but at the same time I know that the Great Father is wealthy. I want to tap the telegraph that is over the river, and talk to the Great Father in that way, and to have him answer me in the same way. I want him to give me plenty of mowing-machines, and I would like very much to have a good blacksmith. I will show you something to-day that I have done in this country in the way of farming; a large pumpkin that I have sent to be brought here to show you. My friends, you may think that I never raised it when you see it, but I want to show it to you, and have sent for it.

Red Feather:—The Great Father asked me in regard to the missions and churches and schools, and told me I must take hold of that and assist him. There were two ministers here, and I regarded them as two canes to walk upon and help me up with. There is one thing that the people of the Great Father have that I do not want, and that is whisky. I do not want any whisky on my reservation. Whenever a man drinks whisky he loses his senses, and that is the reason why I object to it.

Duck:—The soldiers that are fighting have killed a great many people on both sides, and have made many widows and orphans on both sides. I am sorry to know that anybody was killed on either side. All the badness and all the trouble that has occurred here formerly, I gather it up in my hand and throw it away; tell the Great Father that. Look at this people; they are poor people; they have a hard time to get what little furs and hides they have; but when we take them to the stores we do not get enough for them. If you are not afraid of me, and do not think I am fooling with [Pg 153] you, I would like to have you attend to this hide business, and see that we get $6 apiece for them.

White Bull:—I see, my friends, the soldiers standing here about me. They are people whose business it is to die, but we think better things for them. We have given them the Black Hills; we wish they would go there and dig gold without being afraid of anybody.

Crow Creek Agency. White Ghost:—Around and about the hills on the prairies there are a great many dead people lying, but the Great Father has decided to give us a good price for the hills; therefore it is—because the Great Father is strong—that we are willing to give them up. We live right near a trading-post, and we become poor because we have not money to buy those things we want. I do not wish you to think that I am finding fault or out of temper. I merely say the things I am instructed to say. My people wish to have it understood that they do not wish to have any soldiers sent here or any soldier for an agent. I must tell everything that I am instructed to say; they are all here listening to see whether I say everything, and I must say all that I have been told. We would like to have Mr. Premeau appointed for interpreter. He is a white man, a man that understands the language, and does not drink whisky. My people think that the flour that is sent here for them is sent for them to eat, and they are not pleased that it is fed to the pigs about the agency; and they wish me to mention that we take a hide to the store, quite a large one, and receive an order for three dollars' worth of goods. For this large beef-hide we get one piece of leather the width of three fingers, for a belt; it is not worth more than fifty cents. That does not please us.

Last summer when I went to the council for the Black Hills, I had a pipe with me. I told them, in reference to the Black Hills, that we were bound by giving and receiving the pipe, the same as white people when they make an oath in court and swear upon the Bible, and if the party took the pipe that was offered to him in council and held it in his hand everything went well, and if he did not speak the truth always some evil would spring up in connection with it. Last summer the pipe was given in council, and what do you think of the matter now? Have the promises been kept, or has the violation of them caused war and bloodshed? I have for a long time known the ways of your people in dealing with us and taking away our country, and I know that they have [Pg 154]

been such as to make us miserable. You have driven away our game and our means of livelihood out of the country, until now we have nothing left that is valuable except the hills that you ask us to give up. When we give these up to the Great Father we know that we give up the last thing that is valuable either to us or the white people; and therefore my people wish me to say that, as long as two Indians are living, we expect them to have the benefit of the price paid for these lands.

My friend, [to the chairman,] I am going to give you a pipe. Perhaps we are deceiving each other in this matter, perhaps we are not going to be truthful, and shall commit a great sin, but I for my part am trying to speak the truth.

RUNNING BEAR:—I look upon you as you sit before me, and I see that there are no boys among you; that you are all men of age, and I am glad to see it. I am very old, very near the time when I shall lie down in the earth. Therefore if you have really come to help us we are very happy. I will speak now about myself. I am an orphan. Before my father died he told me that my country was very valuable. You say you are going to give me rations by weight; I do not know anything about that; I think it will take me at least twelve years to understand it. It is only yesterday that the people of my generation were laid in the ground, and I am the only one left. My father, who is now dead, went to the Great Father's house and talked with him there. The people have now given you the Black Hills, and we for our part would like to go to our Great Father's house and hear how much money he proposes to give us in return. Again, the whisky that the white people have and carry about with them is very bad. We hear that our people who are living up to the north of us drink a great deal of whisky. We do not like it at all. My friends, I am going to ask you for something that I want. I do not think it possible that you have come out here to ask me for something without paying me for it. I do not consider myself very rich. You white people come out here with a great many pockets in your clothes. Probably the person who sent you told you what to do with the things in your pockets. I would like to have you take up a collection. Each of you put your hands in your pockets and take out ten cents and give it to me to buy something at the store. You are not particularly modest in asking for the things you want, and I see no reason why I should not ask for the things that I want. Do you think I do right in asking you? [Pg 155]

You are a chief, [to the chairman.] I, also, am a chief. I have lived here now 13 years. I do not remember even a bad word that I have said; perhaps the Great Father does. In every country there are men who are skillful in talking in council. I am such a man myself. I also have been instructed. This medal that you see, was put about my neck by a Catholic priest, and yet, notwithstanding I am so honored, you talk to me about issuing rations by weight. I am astonished at you. You are advanced in years; I am also advanced in years.

WHITE BEAR:—I wonder if you know that I planted a field out here. I raised pumpkins as large as this chair and corn taller than I am, and after I had done that my father took my field away to plant oats in. I wonder if you know that. Tell the Great Father that there is only one store here, and all the young men are shedding tears about it. If they had mowing-machines, such as they could ride upon, to ride around their country and cut hay, they would be able to earn something; but the agent considers that the country belongs to him personally, and cuts all the hay. My friends, I would like to have our agent, before the sun goes down, climb up into the second story of the warehouse and take down all the teepee cloths and blankets that he has there, and divide them among the people.

DOG BACK:—I am not anybody in particular. Although I am not very strong and a man of no special importance, I took a claim, and planted, and considered that I was watching my own hay and grass. I am the man that has been trying to live in the way that I have been told, but this summer a great many white men have come there and cut my wood, and killed the fowls and animals I have raised, and disturbed me in many ways. I do not wish to make any disturbance about it, but I have been trying to do as the Great Father advised us, and it seems to me that these people who come and do such things to me are lawless people. I have nobody to help me, but you come here to-day from the Great Father, and I have told you these things in the hope that you will help me.

Santee Agency. HAKEWASTE:—I am an Indian and was born naked. I now wear the same kind of clothes as the white man. Old Wabashaw told me that the President wanted us to work, and for that reason I have dressed in this way, but what you have been explaining to me I know nothing about. I have only been six years a chief in this land. You can see how we are situated here; that we have done part of what the President told us to do; you see little patches of corn, &c. As old man Wabashaw is buried here we would all like to live here. We will all do what you ask of us in the treaty. We own nothing, and have nothing to depend upon. When the President makes up his mind to do a thing he generally does it, but we do not want to go to that territory to the south. [Pg 156]

WAMAMSA:—The Lord above rules everything, and he has given us a nice mild day for our council. We have prayed for land and churches, and as we now have three churches I think the Lord has taken good care of us and has answered our prayers. Look at these young men. You have not seen any Indians during your travels dressed in that way. We are not getting along very well—not as well as we should. Twice now we have had Quakers for agents, and we are going down hill all the time; getting into the ground.

HUSASA:—I have been blind for four years, but I can hear what is said. When any one comes from Washington to see us we ought to be thankful to him. When we lived at Redwood we made the treaty, and it was mentioned that we were to draw annuities and money for fifty years, and for that reason we put ourselves in the wrong place and

suffer for it to-day. There are only three chiefs left now, and all we have to do is to throw ourselves into the arms of the Great Father. We are all pretty badly off. When people used to come here from Washington, Wabashaw was here to speak, but now he is lying in the ground and we are all the time looking that way at him. A great many of us have no wagons or oxen or anything to work with. I have nothing but an old wagon that is not fit for use, and am as poor as if I had not sold any land to the President. The Indians' minds are not very long and we forget a thing in a very short time. You have told us what to do. We have got it all in our ears and ought to be proud of it.

The President said that he would take good care of us, and now here I am blind and have not got a wagon fit to use. Although I am blind, if I had a wagon the women or some of the boys could bring me water when I am thirsty.

FOOTNOTES:

[A] Leaders or chiefs—corrupted from the French of Bourgeois, and borrowed from the Canadians.

[B] Major Joel H. Elliot of the 7th Cavalry, and 19 of his command, were missing after the Battle of the Washita in Nov., 1868. Their dead bodies were found some weeks later.

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE:

Obvious typographical errors and printer errors have been corrected without comment.

On page 158, the word "Py" was changed to "By" in the phrase: "Py ----, who did shoot...."

With the exception of obvious errors, inconsistencies in the author's spelling, punctuation, use of hyphens, and use of quotation marks have been retained as in the original publication. Inconsistencies include, but are not limited to the following:

gayety/ gaiety
Ogallala/ Ogallalla
Camanche/ Commanches

In the original publication, italics are used inconsistently in the illustration captions. They are reproduced here as they appear in the original.

Unconventional spelling has been retained in words such as (but not limited to) the following:

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