

NOAH BROOKS

THE BOY SETTLERS: A
STORY OF EARLY TIMES
IN KANSAS

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CHAPTER I. THE SETTLERS, AND WHENCE THEY CAME

There were five of them, all told; three boys and two men. I have mentioned the boys first because there were more of them, and we shall hear most from them before we have got through with this truthful tale. They lived in the town of Dixon, on the Rock River, in Lee County, Illinois. Look on the map, and you will find this place at a point where the Illinois Central Railroad crosses the Rock; for this is a real town with real people. Nearly sixty years ago, when there were Indians all over that region of the country, and the red men were numerous where the flourishing States of Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin are now, John Dixon kept a little ferry at the point of which I am now speaking, and it was known as Dixon's Ferry. Even when he was not an old man, Dixon was noted for his long and flowing white hair, and the Indians called him Na-chu-sa, "the White-haired." In 1832 the Sac tribe of Indians, with their chief Black Hawk, rose in rebellion against the Government, and then there happened what is now called the Black Hawk war.

In that war many men who afterwards became famous in the history of the United States were engaged in behalf of the government. One of these was Zachary Taylor, afterwards better known as "Rough and Ready," who fought bravely in the Mexican war and subsequently became President of the United States. Another was Robert Anderson, who, at the beginning of the war of the Rebellion, in 1861, commanded the Union forces in Fort Sumter when it was first fired upon. Another was Jefferson Davis, who, in the course of human events, became President of the Southern Confederacy. A fourth man, destined to be more famous than any of the others, was Abraham Lincoln. The first three of these were officers in the army of the United States. Lincoln was at first a private soldier, but was afterwards elected captain of his company, with whom he had come to the rescue of the white settlers from the lower part of the State.

The war did not last long, and there was not much glory gained by anybody in it. Black Hawk was beaten, and that country had peace ever after. For many years, and even unto this day, I make no doubt, the early settlers of the Rock River country loved to tell stories of the Black Hawk war, of their own sufferings, exploits, hardships, and adventures. Father Dixon, as he was called, did not choose to talk much about himself, for he was a modest old gentleman, and was not given, as they used to say, to "blowing his own horn," but his memory was a treasure-house of delightful anecdotes and reminiscences of those old times; and young and old would sit around the comfortable stove of a country store, during a dull winter evening, drinking in tales of Indian warfare and of the "old settlers" that had been handed down from generation to generation.

It is easy to see how boys brought up in an atmosphere like this, rich in traditions of the long-past in which the early settlement of the country figured, should become imbued with the same spirit of adventure that had brought their fathers from the older States to this new region of the West. Boys played at Indian warfare over the very ground on which they had learned to believe the Sacs and Foxes had skirmished years and years before. They loved to hear of Black Hawk and his brother, the Prophet, as he was called; and I cannot tell you with what reverence they regarded Father Dixon, the white-haired old man who had actually talked and traded with the famous Indians, and whose name had been given him as a title of respect by the great Black Hawk himself.

Among the boys who drank in this sort of lore were Charlie and Alexander Howell and their cousin Oscar Bryant. Charlie, when he had arrived at his eighteenth birthday, esteemed himself a man, ready to put away childish things; and yet, in his heart, he dearly loved the traditions of the Indian occupation of the country, and wished that he had been born earlier, so that he might have had a share in the settlement of the Rock River region, its reclamation from the wilderness, and the chase of the wild Indian. As for Alexander, commonly known as "Sandy," he had worn out a thick volume of Cooper's novels before he was fifteen years old, at which interesting point in his career I propose to introduce him to you. Oscar was almost exactly as many years and days old as his cousin. But two boys more unlike in appearance could not be found anywhere in a long summer day. Sandy was short, stubbed, and stocky in build. His face was florid and freckled, and his hair and complexion, like his name, were sandy. Oscar was tall, slim, wiry, with a long, oval face, black hair, and so lithe in his motions that he was invariably cast for the part of the leading Indian in all games that required an aboriginal character.

Mr. Howell carried on a transportation business, until the railroads came into the country and his occupation was gone. Then he began to consider seriously the notion of going further west with his boys to get for them the same chances of early forestalling the settlement of the country that he had had in Illinois. In the West, at least in those days, nearly everybody was continually looking for a yet further West to which they might emigrate. Charlie Howell was now a big and willing, good-natured boy; he ought to be striking out for himself and getting ready to earn his own living. At least, so his father thought.

Mr. Bryant was engaged in a profitable business, and he had no idea of going out into another West for himself or his boy. Oscar was likely to be a scholar, a lawyer, or a minister, perhaps. Even at the age of fifteen, he had written "a piece" which the editor of the Dixon *Telegraph* had thought worthy of the immortality of print in his columns.

But about this time, the Northern States were deeply stirred by the struggle in the new Territory of Kansas to decide whether freedom or slavery should be established therein. This was in 1854 and thereabout. The Territory had been left open and unoccupied for a long time. Now settlers were pouring into it from adjacent States, and the question whether freedom should be the rule, or whether slave-holding was to be tolerated, became a very important one. Missouri and Arkansas, being the States nearest to Kansas, and holding slavery to be a necessity, furnished the largest number of emigrants who went to vote in favor of bringing slavery into the new Territory; but others of the same way of thinking came from more distant States, even as far off as South Carolina, all bent on voting for slavery in the laws that were to be made. For the most part, these people from the slave States did not go prepared to make their homes in Kansas or Nebraska; for some went to the adjoining Territory of Nebraska, which was also ready to have slavery voted up or down. The newcomers intended to stay just long enough to vote and then return to their own homes.

The people of the free States of the North heard of all this with much indignation. They had always supposed that the new Territories were to be free from slavery. They saw that if slavery should be allowed there, by and by, when the two Territories would become States, they would be slave States, and then there would be more slave States than free States in the Union. So they held meetings, made speeches, and passed resolutions, denouncing this sort of immigration as wrong and wicked. Then immigrants from Iowa, Illinois, and other Northern States, even as far off as Massachusetts, sold their homes and household goods and started for the Promised Land, as many of them thought it to be. For the men in Kansas who were opposed to slavery wrote and sent far and wide papers and pamphlets, setting forth in glowing colors the advantages of the new and beautiful country beyond the Missouri River, open to the industry and enterprise of everybody. Soon the roads and highways of Iowa were dotted with white-topped wagons of immigrants journeying to Kansas, and long lines of caravans, with families and with small knots of men, stretched their way across the country nearest to the Territory.

Some of these passed through Dixon, and the boys gazed with wonder at the queer inscriptions that were painted on the canvas covers of the wagons; they longed to go with the immigrants, and taste the sweets of a land which was represented to be full of wild flowers, game in great abundance, and fine streams, and well-wooded hills not far away from the water. They had heard their elders talk of the beauties of Kansas, and of the great outrage that was to be committed on that fair land by carrying slavery into it; and although they did not know much about the politics of the case, they had a vague notion that they would like to have a hand in the exciting business that was going on in Kansas.

Both parties to this contest thought they were right. Men who had been brought up in the slave States believed that slavery was a good thing—good for the country, good for the slave-owner, and even good for the slave. They could not understand how anybody should think differently from them. But, on the other hand, those who had never owned slaves, and who had been born and brought up in the free States, could not be brought to look upon slavery as anything but a very wicked thing. For their part, they were willing (at least, some of them were) to fight rather than consent that the right of one man to own another man should be recognized in the Territories of Kansas and Nebraska. Some of these started at once for the debatable land; others helped their neighbors to go, and many others stayed at home and talked about it.

Mrs. Bryant, Oscar's mother, said: "Dear me, I am tired and sick of hearing about 'bleeding Kansas.' I do wish, husband, you would find something else to talk about before Oscar. You have got him so worked up that I shouldn't be the least bit surprised if he were to start off with some of those tired-looking immigrants that go traipsing through the town day by day." Mrs. Bryant was growing anxious, now that her husband was so much excited about the Kansas-Nebraska struggle, as it was called, he could think of nothing else.

CHAPTER II. THE FIRE SPREADS

One fine morning in May, Mr. Bryant was standing at his front gate watching for his brother-in-law, Mr. Howell, to come down the street.

He held a newspaper in his hand, and with this, loosely rolled, he was impatiently tapping on the gate as Mr. Howell drew near. Evidently something had happened to disturb him.

“See here, Aleck,” he exclaimed, as soon as his brother-in-law was within the sound of his voice, “I can stand this sort of thing no longer. I’m bound to go to Kansas. I’ve been thinking it over, and I have about made up my mind to go. Brubaker will take my store and the good-will of the concern. Oscar is wild to go, and his mother is perfectly able to take care of the house while I am getting ready for her to come out. What d’ye say? Will you go too?”

“Well,” said Mr. Howell, slowly, “you nearly take my breath away! What’s happened to stir you up so?”

“Just listen to this!” cried the other, “just listen!” and, unfolding his newspaper, he read, with glowing cheeks and kindling eyes, an account of an attack made by some of the “pro-slavery men,” as they were named, on a party of free-State immigrants who had attempted to cross the river near Kansas City. His voice trembled with excitement, and when he had finished reading, he asked his companion what he thought of that.

Mr. Howell looked pensively down the street, now embowered with the foliage of early summer, noted the peaceful aspect of the village, and the tranquil picture which gardens, cottages, and sauntering groups of school-children presented, and then said slowly, “I never was much of a hand at shooting, Charles, leastways, shooting at folks; and I don’t know that I could take steady aim at a man, even if I knew he was a Border Ruffian out gunning for me. But I’m with you, Charles. Charlie and Sandy can do a heap sight better in Kansas, after things get settled, than they can here. This place is too old; there’s too much competition, and the boys will not have any show if they stay here. But what does Amanda say?”

Now, Amanda was Mr. Bryant’s wife, Mr. Aleck Howell’s sister. When Aleck asked this question, the two men looked at each other for a moment, queerly and without speaking.

“Well, she’ll hate to part with Oscar; he’s the apple of her eye, as it were. But I guess she will listen to reason. When I read this piece in the paper to her this morning, at the breakfast-table, she was as mad as a wet hen. As for Oscar, he’s so fired up about it that he is down in the wood-shed chopping wood to blow off steam. Hear him?” And Mr. Bryant laughed quietly, notwithstanding his rising anger over the news of the day.

At that moment Sandy came whooping around the corner, intent on overtaking a big yellow dog, his constant companion,—Bose by name,—who bounded along far in advance of the boy. “See here, Sandy,” said his uncle, “how would you like to go to Kansas with your father, Oscar, Charlie, and myself?”

“To Kansas? shooting buffaloes, deer, Indians, and all that? To Kansas? Oh, come, now, Uncle Charles, you don’t mean it.”

“But I do mean it, my laddie,” said the elder man, affectionately patting the freckled cheek of the lad. “I do mean it, and if you can persuade your father to go along and take you and Charlie with him, we’ll make up a party—just we five—that will scare the Border Ruffians ’way into the middle of next year.” Then, with a more serious air, he added, “This is a fight for freedom, my boy, and every man and every boy who believes in God and Liberty can find a chance to help. I’m sure *we* can.” This he said with a certain sparkle of his eye that may have meant mischief to any Border Ruffian that might have been there to see and hear.

As for Sandy, he turned two or three hand-springs by way of relieving his feelings; then, having once more assured himself that the two men had serious thoughts of migrating to Kansas, he rushed off to the wood-shed to carry the wonderful news to Oscar. Dropping his axe, the lad listened with widened eyes to the story that Sandy had to tell.

“Do you know, Sandy,” he said, with an air of great wisdom, “I thought there was something in the wind. Oh, I never saw father so roused as he was when he read that story in the *Chicago Press and Tribune* this morning. Why, I thought he’d just get up and howl when he had read it out to mother. Jimmini! Do you really suppose that he will go? And take us? And Uncle Aleck? Oh, wouldn’t that be too everlastingly bully for anything?” Oscar, as you will see, was given to the use of slang, especially when under great excitement. The two boys rushed back to the gate, where the brothers-in-law were still talking eagerly and in undertones.

“If your mother and Aunt Amanda will consent, I guess we will go,” said Mr. Bryant, with a smile on his face as he regarded the flushed cheeks and eager eyes of Sandy and Oscar. Sandy’s father added: “And I’ll answer for your mother, my son. She and I have talked this thing over many a time, more on your account and Charlie’s than for the sake of ‘bleeding Kansas,’ however. I’m bound to say that. Every man is in honor bound to do his duty by the country and by the good cause; but I have got to look after my boys first.” And the father lovingly laid his hand on Sandy’s sturdy shoulder. “Do you think you could fight, if the worst comes to the worst, Sandy, boy?”

Of course the lad protested confidently that he could fight; certainly he could protect his rights and his father’s rights, even with a gun, if that should be found necessary. But he admitted that, on the whole, he would rather shoot buffaloes and antelope, both of which species of large game he had already learned were tolerably plentiful in Kansas.

“Just think of it, Oscar, we might have some real Indian-fighting out there, like that Father Dixon and the rest of the old settlers had in the time of the Black Hawk war.”

His father assured him, however, that there was no longer any danger from the red man in Kansas. The wild Indians were now far out on the frontier, beyond the region to which emigrants would probably go in search of homestead lands for settlement. Sandy looked relieved at this explanation. He was not anxious for fighting with anybody. Fun was more to his liking.

The two mothers, when they were informed of the decision of the male members of the family, made very little opposition to the emigration scheme. In fact, Mrs. Howell had really felt for some time past that her boys would be better provided for in a new country. She had been one of the “old settlers” of Dixon, having been brought out from the interior of New York when she and her brother were small children. She had the same spirit of adventure that he had, and, although she remembered very well the privations and the discomforts of those early days, it was more with amusement than sorrow that she recalled them to mind, now that they were among the traditions of long-past years. The two young Howells were never weary of hearing their mother tell of the time when she killed a wildcat with her father’s rifle, or of her walking fifteen miles and back to buy herself a bonnet-ribbon to wear to her first ball in the court-house. Now her silent influence made it easier for the Kansas Exodus (as they already called their scheme) to be accepted all around.

The determination of the two families to migrate made some stir in the town. It was yet a small place, and everybody knew every other body’s business. The Bryants and Howells were among the “old families,” and their momentous step created a little ripple of excitement among their friends and acquaintances. The boys enjoyed the talk and the gossip that arose around them, and already considered themselves heroes in a small way. With envious eyes and eager faces, their comrades surrounded them, wherever they went, asking questions about their outfit, their plans, and their future movements. Every boy in Dixon looked on the three prospective boy settlers as the most fortunate of all their young playfellows.

“I wish my father would catch the ‘Kansas fever,’” said Hiram Fender, excitedly. “Don’t you suppose your father could give it to him, Charlie? Do you suppose your uncle would take me along

if Dad would let me go? Oh, wouldn't that be just gaudy, if I could go! Then there would be four of us boys. Try it on him."

But the two families resolutely attended to their own business, asking help from nobody, and not even so much as hinting to anybody that it would be a good thing for others to go with them to the Promised Land. The three boys were speedily in the midst of preparations for their migration. It was now well along in the middle of May. If they were to take up land claims in Kansas and get in a crop, they had no time to spare. The delightful excitement of packing, of buying arms and ammunition, and of winding up all the small concerns of their life in Dixon made the days pass swiftly by. There were all the details of tents for camping-out, provisions for the march, and rough clothing and walking gear for the new life beyond to be looked after.

Some of the notions of the boys, in regard to what was needed and what was to be expected from the land beyond, were rather crude. And perhaps their fathers were not in all cases so wise as they thought themselves. The boys, however, cherished the idea that absolutely everything they should require in Kansas must be carried from Illinois. "Why," said the practical Mr. Howell, "if we cannot buy ploughs, cattle, and seed, cheaper in Missouri than we can here, we can at least save the labor and cost of transportation. We don't want to haul a year's provisions, either. We expect to raise something to eat, don't we?"

Charlie, to whom this remonstrance was addressed, replied, "Well, of course we can raise some garden truck, and I suppose we can buy bacon and flour cheaper in Missouri than here."

"Then there's the game," interrupted Oscar and Sandy, both in one breath. "Governor Robinson's book says that the country is swarming with game," added Sandy, excitedly.

The boys had devoured a little book by Mr. Robinson, the free-State Governor of Kansas, in which the richness of the Promised Land was glowingly set forth.

"Much time we shall have to shoot buffaloes and antelope when we are breaking up the sod and planting corn," Mr. Howell answered with a shade of sarcasm in his voice.

"And we may have to fire at bigger game than either of those," added Mr. Bryant, grimly.

"Border Ruffians?" asked Sandy, with a feeble attempt at a grin. His mother shuddered and hastily went out of the room. The Kansas scheme seemed no longer pleasant to her, when she read the dreadful stories of violence and bloodshed with which some of the Western newspapers were teeming. But it was settled that most of the tools needed for farming could be bought better in Missouri than in Illinois; the long haul would be saved, and the horses with which they were to start could be exchanged for oxen to good advantage when they reached "the river." They had already adopted the common phrase, "the river," for the Missouri River, then generally used by people emigrating westward.

"But perhaps the Missourians will not sell you anything when they know that you are free-State men," suggested Mrs. Bryant, timidly, for this was a family council.

"Oh, well," answered Mr. Howell, sturdily, "I'll risk that. I never saw a man yet with anything to sell who wouldn't sell it when the money was shaken in his face. The newspapers paint those border men pretty black, I know; but if they stop to ask a man's politics before they make a bargain with him, they must be queer cattle. They are more than human or less than human, not Americans at all, if they do business in that way." In the end they found that Mr. Howell was entirely right.

All was settled at last, and that, too, in some haste, for the season was rapidly advancing when planting must be attended to, if they were to plant that year for the fall harvest. From the West they heard reports of hosts of people pouring into the new Territory, of land being in great demand, and of the best claims near the Missouri being taken by early emigrants. They must be in a hurry if they were to get a fair chance with the rest and a fair start on their farm,—a farm yet existing only in their imagination.

Their wagon, well stored with clothing and provisions, a few books, Oscar's violin, a medicine chest, powder, shot, and rifle-balls, and an assortment of odds and ends,—the wagon, so long a magical repository of hopes and the most delightful anticipations, was ready at last. It stood at the side gate of

Mr. Bryant's home, with a "spike team" (two horses at the pole, and one horse for a leader) harnessed. It was a serious, almost solemn, moment. Now that the final parting had come, the wrench with which the two families were to be broken up seemed harder than any of the members had expected. The two mothers, bravely keeping up smiling faces, went about the final touches of preparations for the lads' departure and the long journey of their husbands.

Mr. Howell mounted the wagon with Sandy by his side; Mr. Bryant took his seat with the other two boys in an open buggy, which they were to drive to "the river" and there trade for a part of their outfit. Fond and tearful kisses had been exchanged and farewells spoken. They drove off into the West. The two women stood at the gate, gazing after them with tear-dimmed eyes as long as they were in sight; and when the little train disappeared behind the first swale of the prairie, they burst into tears and went into the house which was now left unto them desolate.

It was a quiet party that drove over the prairie that bright and beautiful morning. The two boys in the buggy spoke occasionally in far-off-sounding voices about indifferent things that attracted their attention as they drove along. Mr. Howell held the reins, with a certain stern sense of duty on his dark and handsome face. Sandy sat silently by his side, the big tears coursing down his freckled cheeks.

CHAPTER III. ON THE DISPUTED TERRITORY

The straggling, unkempt, and forlorn town of Parkville, Missouri, was crowded with strangers when the emigrants arrived there after a long and toilsome drive through Iowa. They had crossed the Mississippi from Illinois into Iowa, at Fulton, on the eastern shore, and after stopping to rest for a day or two in Clinton, a pretty village on the opposite bank, had pushed on, their faces ever set westward. Then, turning in a southwesterly direction, they travelled across the lower part of the State, and almost before they knew it they were on the sacred soil of Missouri, the dangers of entering which had been pictured to them all along the route. They had been warned by the friendly settlers in Iowa to avoid St. Joseph, one of the crossings from Missouri into Kansas; it was a nest of Border Ruffians, so they were told, and they would surely have trouble. They must also steer clear of Leavenworth; for that town was the headquarters of a number of Missourians whose names were already terrible all over the Northern States, from Kansas to Massachusetts Bay.

“But there is the military at Fort Leavenworth,” replied Mr. Bryant. “Surely they will protect the citizens of the United States who are peaceful and well-behaved. We are only peaceable immigrants.”

“Pshaw!” answered an Iowa man. “All the army officers in this part of the country are pro-slavery men. They are in sympathy with the pro-slavery men, anyhow, and if they had been sent here to keep free-State men out of the Territory, they couldn’t do any different from what they are doing. It’s an infernal shame, that’s what it is.”

Bryant said nothing in reply, but as they trudged along, for the roads were very bad, and they could not often ride in their vehicles now, his face grew dark and red by turns. Finally he broke out,—

“See here, Aleck,” he cried, “I don’t want to sneak into the Territory. If these people think they can scare law-abiding and peaceable citizens of a free country from going upon the land of these United States, we might just as well fight first as last. For one, I will not be driven out of a country that I have got just as much right to as any of these hot-headed Missouri fellows.”

His brother-in-law looked troubled, but before he could speak the impetuous and fiery Sandy said: “That’s the talk, Uncle Charlie! Let’s go in by the shortest way, and tackle the Border Ruffians if they tackle us. Who’s afraid?” And the lad bravely handled his “pepper-box,” as his old-fashioned five-barrelled revolver was sportively called by the men of those days; for the modern revolver with one barrel for all the chambers of the weapon had not then come into use. “Who’s afraid?” he repeated fiercely, looking around. Everybody burst out laughing, and the valorous Sandy looked rather crestfallen.

“I am afraid, for one,” said his father. “I want no fighting, no bloodshed. I want to get into the Territory and get to work on our claim, just as soon as possible; but if we can’t get there without a fight, why then, I’ll fight. But I ain’t seeking for no fight.” When Aleck Howell was excited, his grammar went to the four winds. His view of the situation commended itself to the approval of Oscar, who said he had promised his mother that he would avoid every appearance of hostile intention, keep a civil tongue in his head, have his weapons out of sight and his powder always dry.

The emigrants decided to go into Kansas by way of Parkville.

At Claybank, half-way between the Iowa line and the Missouri River, they encountered a drover with a herd of cattle. He was eager to dicker with the Kansas emigrants, and offered them what they considered to be a very good bargain in exchanging oxen for their horses. They were now near the Territory, and the rising prices of almost everything that immigrants required warned them that they were not far from the point where an outfit could no longer be bought at any reasonable price. The boys were loth to part with their buggy; for, although they had been often compelled to go afoot through some of the worst roads in the States of Iowa and Missouri, they had clung to the notion that

they might have a pair of horses to take into the Territory, and, while the buggy was left to them, they had a refuge in times of weariness with walking; and these were rather frequent. The wagon was exchanged for another, suitable for oxen.

The immigrants drove gayly into Parkville. They were in sight of the Promised Land. The Big Muddy, as Missourians affectionately call the turbid stream that gives name to their State, rolled sluggishly between the Parkville shore and the low banks fringed with cottonwoods that were the eastern boundary of Kansas. Looking across, they could see long lines of white-covered wagons, level plains dotted with tents, and the rising smoke of many fires, where people who had gone in ahead of them were cooking their suppers; for they entered Parkville late in the afternoon. It was a commonplace-looking view of Kansas, after all, and not at all like what the lads had fancied it would be. Sandy very emphatically expressed his disappointment.

“What would you have, Sandy?” asked his uncle, with some amusement. “Did you expect to see wild honey dripping out of the cottonwoods and sycamores, buffaloes and deer standing up and waiting to be shot at, and a farm ready to be tilled?”

“Well,” replied the boy, a little shamefacedly, “I didn’t exactly expect to see all those things; but somehow the country looks awful flat and dull. Don’t you think so?”

For answer, Mr. Bryant pointed out a line of blue slopes in the distance. “Those are not very high hills, my boy, to be sure, but they are on the rolling prairie beyond, and as soon as we get away from the river we shall find a bluff and diversified country, I’ll warrant you.”

“Yes; don’t you remember,” broke in Oscar, eagerly, “Governor Robinson’s book told all about the rolling and undulating country of the Territory, and the streams that run under high bluffs in some places?”

Sandy admitted that this was true of the book; but he added, “Some books do lie, though.”

“Not Governor Robinson’s book,” commented his brother Charlie, with a slight show of resentment. For Charlie had made a study of the reports from the Promised Land.

But a more pressing matter was the attitude of the border-State men toward the free-State emigrants, and the question of making the necessary purchases for their farming scheme. Parkville was all alive with people, and there were many border-State men among them. Some of these regarded the newcomers with unmistakable hostility, noting which, Sandy and Oscar took good care to keep near their two grown-up protectors; and the two men always went about with their weapons within easy reaching distance. All of the Borderers were opposed to any more free-State men going into the Territory; and many of them were disposed to stop this by force, if necessary. At one time, the situation looked very serious, and Sandy got his “pepper-box” into position. But the trouble passed away, and the arrival of fifteen or twenty teams, accompanied by a full complement of men, checked a rising storm of wrath.

From Platte City, a short distance up the river, however, came doleful and distressing stories of the ill-treatment of the free-State men who had gone that way. They were harassed and hindered, and, in some cases, their teams were deliberately turned about and driven back on the road by which they had come. It was useless to remonstrate when the rifles of a dozen men were levelled at the would-be immigrants. But our travellers in Parkville heard a good story of the bravery of one free-State man who had been refused transportation across the ferry at Platte City, kept by an ardent pro-slavery man. The intending immigrant, unconscious of any hindrance to his crossing, was calmly driving down to the ferry-boat, a flat-bottomed craft propelled by long oars, or sweeps, when the ferryman stopped him with the question, “What hev ye got into yer waggin?”

“Oxen,” sententiously replied the newcomer.

“And what’s them thar cattle follering on behind?” he asked, pointing to a drove of milch-cattle in the rear.

“Caouws,” answered the immigrant, in the broad pronunciation peculiar to provincial people of the New England States.

“All right,” was the rejoinder; “a man that says ‘caouws’ can’t go over this yere ferry withouten he’s got the tickets.” No argument would induce the ferryman to explain what the tickets were and where they could be procured. Finally, his patience exhausted, the free-State man suddenly drew from the big pockets of his frock a pair of tremendous pistols, ready cocked, and, holding them full in the face of the surprised ferryman, he said,—

“Here are my tickets, and I’m going across this ferry right off, caouws or no caouws!” And he went.

Even at Parkville, where there was very little difficulty in crossing, as compared with what there had been earlier in the struggle for Kansas, they were advised by discreet friends and sympathizers to be on the lookout for opposition. Every fresh arrival of free-State men angered yet more the Borderers who were gathered there to hinder and, if possible, prevent further immigration. Mr. Bryant chafed under the necessity of keeping his voice hushed on the topic that engaged all his thoughts; and Oscar and Sandy were ready to fight their way across the river; at least they said so.

They did find, however, that the buying of provisions and farming-tools required for their future use, was out of the question in Parkville. Whether it was the unexpected demand, or a refusal of the Missourians to sell to free-State men, they could not determine. But the prices of everything they wanted were very high. What should they do? These articles they must have. But their cost here was far beyond their most extravagant estimates. When Mr. Howell was reminded by his brother-in-law how he had said that no politics could interfere with trade and prices, he was amused.

“Of course,” he said, “it does look as if these Missourians would not sell at fair prices because they want to hinder us; but don’t you see that the demand is greater than the supply? I know these folks are bitterly hostile to us; but the reason why they have so small a stock of goods on hand is that they have sold out to other free-State men that have come before us to buy the same things. Isn’t that so?”

Mr. Bryant was obliged to admit that this was a reasonable explanation; but as he had begun by thinking that every Borderer hated a free-State man and would do him an injury if he could, he did not give up that notion willingly. He was certain that there was a plot in the high prices of bacon, flour, corn-meal, and ploughs.

In this serious dilemma, Charlie came to the relief of the party with the information that a free-State man, whose team had just recrossed the river for a load of supplies sent him by a wagon that was to return to Iowa, brought news that a large trading-post had been opened at a new Kansas town called Quindaro. He said that the Iowa man told him that prices were just now lower in Quindaro than they had ever been in Parkville.

“Quindaro?” said Oscar, musingly;—“why, that must be an Indian name,—feminine Indian name, too, unless I miss my guess.”

Mr. Bryant had heard of Quindaro. It was a brand-new town, a few miles down the river, settled by free-State men and named for a young, full-blooded Indian girl of the Delaware tribe. The town was on the borders of the Delaware reservation, which in those days came close to the Missouri River. Charlie, also, had gathered some facts about the town, and he added that Quindaro was a good place to start from, going westward. The party had laid in a stock of groceries—coffee, tea, and other articles of that description—before leaving home. Now they needed staple provisions, a few farming tools, a breaking-plough, and some seed corn. Few thought of planting anything but corn; but the thrifty settlers from Illinois knew the value of fresh vegetables, and they were resolved to have “garden truck” just as soon as seeds could be planted and brought to maturity.

“And side-meat?” asked Sandy, wonderingly, as he heard his father inquiring the price of that article of food. Side-meat, in the South and West, is the thin flank of a porker, salted and smoked after the fashion of hams, and in those parts of the Southwest it was (and probably is) the staple article of food among the people. It is sold in long, unattractive-looking slabs; and when Sandy heard its name mentioned, his disgust as well as his wonder was kindled.

“Side-meat?” he repeated, with a rising inflection. “Why, I thought we were going to live on game,—birds and buffalo and the like! Side-meat? Well, that makes me sick!”

The two men laughed, and Mr. Howell said,—

“Why, Sandy, you are bent on hunting and not on buckling down to farm work. How do you suppose we are going to live if we have nothing to eat but wild game that we kill, and breadstuffs and vegetables that we buy?”

Sandy had thought that they might be able to step out into the woods or prairie, between times, as it were, and knock down a few head of game when the day’s work was done, or had not begun. When he said as much, the two heads of the party laughed again, and even Charlie joined in the glee.

“My dear infant,” said his father, seriously, but with a twinkle in his eye, “game is not so plenty anywhere as that; and if it were, we should soon tire of it. Now side-meat ‘sticks to the ribs,’ as the people hereabouts will tell you, and it is the best thing to fall back upon when fresh meat fails. We can’t get along without it, and that is a fact; hey, Charlie?”

The rest of the party saw the wisdom of this suggestion, and Sandy was obliged to give up, then and there, his glowing views of a land so teeming with game that one had only to go out with a rifle, or even a club, and knock it over. But he mischievously insisted that if side-meat did “stick to the ribs,” as the Missourians declared, they did not eat much of it, for, as a rule, the people whom they met were a very lank and slab-sided lot. “Clay-eaters,” their new acquaintance from Quindaro said they were.

“Clay-eaters?” asked Charlie, with a puzzled look. “They are clayey-looking in the face. But it can’t be possible that they actually eat clay?”

“Well, they do, and I have seen them chewing it. There is a fine, soft clay found in these parts, and more especially south of here; it has a greasy feeling, as if it was a fatty substance, and the natives eat it just as they would candy. Why, I should think that it would form a sand-bar inside of a man, after awhile; but they take to it just as naturally!”

“If I have got to choose between side-meat and clay for a regular diet,” said Sandy, “give me side-meat every time.”

That night, having made their plans to avoid the prying eyes of the border-State men, who in great numbers were now coming in, well-armed and looking somewhat grimly at the free-State men, the little party crossed the river. Ten dollars, good United States money, was demanded by the ferryman as the price of their passage; it looked like robbery, but there was no other way of getting over the river and into the Promised Land; so it was paid, with many a wrench of the patience of the indignant immigrants; and they pitched their tent that night under the stars and slept soundly on the soil of “bleeding Kansas.”

Bright and early next morning, the boys were up and stirring, for now was to begin their camp life. Hitherto, they had slept in their tent, but had taken their meals at the farm-houses and small taverns of the country through which they had passed. They would find few such conveniences in the new country into which they had come, and they had been warned that in Kansas the rule was “every man for himself.”

They made sad work with their first breakfast in camp. Oscar had taken a few lessons in cooking from his mother, before leaving home, and the two men had had some experience in that line of duty when out on hunting expeditions in Illinois, years before. So they managed to make coffee, fry slices of side-meat, and bake a hoe-cake of Indian-corn meal. “Hog and hominy,” said Sandy’s father. “That’s the diet of the country, and that is what we shall come to, and we might as well take it first as last.”

“There’s worse provender than this, where there’s none,” said Mr. Bryant, cheerfully; “and before we get through we shall be hungry more than once for hog and hominy.”

It was an enlivening sight that greeted the eyes of the newcomers as they looked around upon the flat prairie that stretched along the river-side. The tents of the immigrants glistened in the rising sun. The smoke of many camp-fires arose on the summer air. Groups of men were busily making

preparations for their long tramp westward, and, here and there, women and children were gathered around the white-topped wagons, taking their early breakfast or getting ready for the day's march. Here, too, could now be seen the rough and surly-looking border men who were on the way to points along the route that were to be occupied by them before too many free-State men should come in. An election of some sort, the newcomers could not exactly make out what, was to take place in a day or two, and the Missourians whom they had seen flocking into Parkville were ready to vote as soon as they got into the Territory.

Breakfast over, the boys sauntered around through the camps, viewing the novel sights with vast amusement. It was like a militia muster at home, except that the only soldier element they saw was the band of rough-looking and rough-talking men who were bound to vote and fight for slavery. They swaggered about with big pistols girt at their hips and rifles over their shoulders, full-bearded and swarthy, each one a captain apparently, all without much organization, but very serious in their intention to vote and to fight. It really seemed as if they had reached the fighting-ground at last.

"See here, daddy," said Oscar, as he came in from the camps when the Dixon caravan was ready to move; "see what I found in this newspaper. It is a piece of poetry, and a mighty fine piece, too"; and the boy began to read some lines beginning thus,—

"We cross the prairie as of old
The pilgrims crossed the sea,
To make the West, as they the East,
The homestead of the free!"

"Oh, well; I can't bother about poetry, now," said the father, hastily. "I have some prose work on hand, just about this time. I'm trying to drive these pesky cattle, and I don't make a very good fist at it. Your Uncle Aleck has gone on ahead, and left me to manage the team; but it's new business to me."

"John G. Whittier is the name at the top of these verses. I've heard of him. He's a regular-built poet,—lives somewhere down East."

"I can't help that, sonny; get on the other side of those steers, and see if you can't gee them around. Dear, dear, they're dreadful obstinate creatures!"

That night, however, when they were comfortably and safely camped in Quindaro, amid the live-oaks and the tall sycamores that embowered the pretty little town, Oscar again brought the newspaper to his father, and, with kindling eyes, said,—

"Read it out, daddy; read the piece. Why, it was written just for us, I do declare. It is called 'The Kansas Emigrants.' We are Kansas Emigrants, aren't we?"

The father smiled kindly as he looked at the flushed face and bright eyes of his boy, and took from him the paper folded to show the verses. As he read, his eyes, too, flashed and his lip trembled.

"Listen to this!" he cried. "Listen to this! It is like a trumpet call!" And with a voice quivering with emotion, he began the poem,—

"We cross the prairie as of old
The pilgrims crossed the sea,
To make the West, as they the East,
The homestead of the free!"

"Something has got into my eyes," said Mr. Howell, as the last stanza was read. "Great Scott! though, how that does stir a man's blood!" And he furtively wiped the moisture from his eyes. It was time to put out the light and go to sleep, for the night now was well advanced. But Mr. Bryant, thoroughly aroused, read and re-read the lines aloud.

“Sing ’em,” said his brother-in-law, jokingly. Bryant was a good singer, and he at once tuned up with a fine baritone voice, recalling a familiar tune that fitted the measure of the poem.

“Oh, come now, Uncle Charlie,” cried Sandy, from his blankets in the corner of the tent, “that’s ‘Old Dundee.’ Can’t you give us something lively? Something not quite so solemn?”

“Not so solemn, my laddie? Don’t you know that this is a solemn age we are in, and a very solemn business we are on? You’ll think so before we get out of this Territory, or I am greatly mistaken.”

“Sandy’ll think it’s solemn, when he has to trot over a piece of newly broken prairie, carrying a pouchful of seed corn, dropping five grains in each sod,” said his father, laughing, as he blew out the candle.

“It’s a good song; a bully good song,” murmured the boy, turning over to sleep. “But it ought to be sung to something with more of a rig-a-jig-jig to it.” So saying, he was off to the land of dreams.

CHAPTER IV. AMONG THE DELAWARES

Quindaro was a straggling but pretty little town built among the groves of the west bank of the Missouri. Here the emigrants found a store or trading-post, well supplied with the goods they needed, staple articles of food and the heavier farming-tools being the first required. The boys looked curiously at the big breaking-plough that was to be of so much consequence to them in their new life and labors. The prairies around their Illinois home had been long broken up when they were old enough to take notice of such things; and as they were town boys, they had never had their attention called to the implements of a prairie farm.

“It looks like a plough that has been sat down on and flattened out,” was Oscar’s remark, after they had looked the thing over very critically. It had a long and massive beam, or body, and big, strong handles, suggestive of hard work to be done with it. “The nose,” as Sandy called the point of the share, was long, flat, and as sharp as a knife. It was this thin and knife-like point that was to cut into the virgin turf of the prairie, and, as the sod was cut, the share was to turn it over, bottom side up, while the great, heavy implement was drawn along by the oxen.

“But the sod is so thick and tough,” said Oscar, “I don’t see how the oxen can drag the thing through. Will our three yoke of cattle do it?”

The two men looked at each other and smiled. This had been a subject of much anxious thought with them. They had been told that they would have difficulty in breaking up the prairie with three yoke of oxen; they should have four yoke, certainly. So when Mr. Howell explained that they must get another yoke and then rely on their being able to “change work” with some of their neighbors who might have cattle, the boys laughed outright.

“Neighbors!” cried Sandy. “Why, I didn’t suppose we should have any neighbors within five or ten miles. Did you, Oscar? I was in hopes we wouldn’t have neighbors to plague us with their pigs and chickens, and their running in to borrow a cupful of molasses, or last week’s newspaper. Neighbors!” and the boy’s brown face wore an expression of disgust.

“Don’t you worry about neighbors, Sandy,” said his uncle. “Even if we have any within five miles of us, we shall do well. But if there is to be any fighting, we shall want neighbors to join forces with us, and we shall find them handy, anyhow, in case of sickness or trouble. We cannot get along in a new country like this without neighbors, and you bear that in mind, Master Sandy.”

The two leaders of this little flock had been asking about the prospects for taking up claims along the Kansas River, or the Kaw, as that stream was then generally called. To their great dismay, they had found that there was very little vacant land to be had anywhere near the river. They would have to push on still further westward if they wished to find good land ready for the pre-emptor. Rumors of fighting and violence came from the new city of Lawrence, the chief settlement of the free-State men, on the Kaw; and at Grasshopper Falls, still further to the west, the most desirable land was already taken up, and there were wild stories of a raid on that locality being planned by bands of Border Ruffians. They were in a state of doubt and uncertainty.

“There she is! There she is!” said Charlie, in a loud whisper, looking in the direction of a tall, unpainted building that stood among the trees that embowered the little settlement. Every one looked and saw a young lady tripping along through the hazel brush that still covered the ground. She was rather stylishly dressed, “citified,” Oscar said; she swung a beaded work-bag as she walked.

“Who is it? Who is it?” asked Oscar, breathlessly. She was the first well-dressed young lady he had seen since leaving Iowa.

“Sh-h-h-h!” whispered Charlie. “That’s Quindaro. A young fellow pointed her out to me last night, just after we drove into the settlement. She lives with her folks in that tall, thin house up there. I have been looking for her to come out. See, she’s just going into the post-office now.”

“Quindaro!” exclaimed Sandy. “Why, I thought Quindaro was a squaw.”

“She’s a full-blooded Delaware Indian girl, that’s what she is, and she was educated somewhere East in the States; and this town is named for her. She owns all the land around here, and is the belle of the place.”

“She’s got on hoop-skirts, too,” said Oscar. “Just think of an Indian girl—a squaw—wearing hoops, will you?” For all this happened, my young reader must remember, when women’s fashions were very different from what they now are. Quindaro—that is to say, the young Indian lady of that time—was dressed in the height of fashion, but not in any way obtrusively. Charlie, following with his eyes the young girl’s figure, as she came out of the post-office and went across the ravine that divided the settlement into two equal parts, mirthfully said, “And only think! That is a full-blooded Delaware Indian girl!”

But, their curiosity satisfied, the boys were evidently disappointed with their first view of Indian civilization. There were no blanketed Indians loafing around in the sun and sleeping under the shelter of the underbrush, as they had been taught to expect to see them. Outside of the settlement, men were ploughing and planting, breaking prairie, and building cabins; and while our party were looking about them, a party of Delawares drove into town with several ox-carts to carry away the purchases that one of their number had already made. It was bewildering to boys who had been brought up on stories of Black Hawk, the Prophet, and the Sacs and Foxes of Illinois and Wisconsin. A Delaware Indian, clad in the ordinary garb of a Western farmer and driving a yoke of oxen, and employing the same curious lingo used by the white farmers, was not a picturesque object.

“I allow that sixty dollars is a big price to pay for a yoke of cattle,” said Mr. Howell, anxiously. He was greatly concerned about the new purchase that must be made here, according to the latest information. “We might have got them for two-thirds of that money back in Illinois. And you know that Iowa chap only reckoned the price of these at forty-five, when we traded with him at Jonesville.”

“It’s no use worrying about that now, Aleck,” said his brother-in-law. “I know you thought then that we should need four yoke for breaking the prairie; but, then, you weren’t certain about it, and none of the rest of us ever had any sod-ploughing to do.”

“No, none of us,” said Sandy, with delightful gravity; at which everybody smiled. One would have thought that Sandy was a veteran in everything but farming.

“I met a man this morning, while I was prowling around the settlement,” said Charlie, “who said that there was plenty of vacant land, of first-rate quality, up around Manhattan. Where’s that, father—do you know? *He* didn’t, but some other man, one of the New England Society fellows, told him so.”

But nobody knew where Manhattan was. This was the first time they had ever heard of the place. The cattle question was first to be disposed of, however, and as soon as the party had finished their breakfast, the two men and Charlie sallied out through the settlement to look up a bargain. Oscar and Sandy were left in the camp to wash the dishes and “clean up,” a duty which both of them despised with a hearty hatred.

“If there’s anything I just fairly abominate, it’s washing dishes,” said Sandy, seating himself on the wagon-tongue and discontentedly eyeing a huge tin pan filled with tin plates and cups, steaming in the hot water that Oscar had poured over them from the camp-kettle.

“Well, that’s part of the play,” answered Oscar, pleasantly. “It isn’t boy’s work, let alone man’s work, to be cooking and washing dishes. I wonder what mother would think to see us at it?” And a suspicious moisture gathered in the lad’s eyes, as a vision of his mother’s tidy kitchen in far-off Illinois rose before his mind. Sandy looked very solemn.

“But, as daddy says, it’s no use worrying about things you can’t help,” continued the cheerful Oscar; “so here goes, Sandy. You wash, and I’ll dry ’em.” And the two boys went on with their

disagreeable work so heartily that they soon had it out of the way; Sandy remarking as they finished it, that, for his part, he did not like the business at all, but he did not think it fair that they two, who could not do the heavy work, should grumble over that they could do. "The worst of it is," he added, "we've got to look forward to months and months of this sort of thing. Father and Uncle Charlie say that we cannot have the rest of the family come out until we have a house to put them in—a log-cabin, they mean, of course; and Uncle Charlie says that we may not get them out until another spring. I don't believe he will be willing for them to come out until he knows whether the Territory is to be slave or free. Do you, Oscar?"

"No, indeed," said Oscar. "Between you and me, Sandy, I don't want to go back to Illinois again, for anything; but I guess father will make up his mind about staying only when we find out if there is to be a free-State government or not. Dear me, why can't the Missourians keep out of here and let us alone?"

"It's a free country," answered Sandy, sententiously. "That's what Uncle Charlie is always saying. The Missourians have just as good a right here as we have."

"But they have no right to be bringing in their slavery with 'em," replied the other. "That wouldn't be a free country, would it, with one man owning another man? Not much."

"That's beyond me, Oscar. I suppose it's a free country only for the white man to come to. But I haven't any politics in me. Hullo! there comes the rest of us driving a yoke of oxen. Well, on my word, they have been quick about it. Uncle Charlie is a master hand at hurrying things, I will say," added Sandy, admiringly. "He's done all the trading, I'll be bound!"

"Fifty-five dollars," replied Bryant, to the boys' eager inquiry as to the price paid for the yoke of oxen. "Fifty-five dollars, and not so very dear, after all, considering that there are more people who want to buy than there are who want to sell."

"And now we are about ready to start; only a few more provisions to lay in. Suppose we get away by to-morrow morning?"

"Oh, that's out of the question, Uncle Aleck," said Oscar. "What makes you in such a hurry? Why, you have all along said we need not get away from here for a week yet, if we did not want to; the grass hasn't fairly started yet, and we cannot drive far without feed for the cattle. Four yoke, too," he added proudly.

"The fact is, Oscar," said his father, lowering his voice and looking around as if to see whether anybody was within hearing distance, "we have heard this morning that there was a raid on this place threatened from Kansas City, over the border. This is the free-State headquarters in this part of the country, and it has got about that the store here is owned and run by the New England Emigrant Aid Society. So they are threatening to raid the place, burn the settlement, run off the stock, and loot the settlers. I should like to have a company of resolute men to defend the place," and Mr. Bryant's eyes flashed; "but this is not our home, nor our fight, and I'm willing to 'light out' right off, or as soon as we get ready."

"Will they come to-night, do you think?" asked Sandy, and his big blue eyes looked very big indeed. "Because we can't get off until we have loaded the wagon and fixed the wheels; you said they must be greased before we travelled another mile, you know."

It was agreed, however, that there was no immediate danger of the raid—certainly not that night; but all felt that it was the part of prudence to be ready to start at once; the sooner, the better. When the boys went to their blankets that night, they whispered to each other that the camp might be raided and so they should be ready for any assault that might come. Sandy put his "pepper-box" under his pillow, and Charlie had his trusty rifle within reach. Oscar carried a double-barrelled shot-gun of which he was very proud, and that weapon, loaded with buckshot, was laid carefully by the side of his blankets. The two elders of the party "slept with one eye open," as they phrased it. But there was no alarm through the night, except once when Mr. Howell got up and went out to see how the cattle were getting on. He found that one of the sentinels who had been set by the Quindaro Company in

consequence of the scare, had dropped asleep on the wagon-tongue of the Dixon party. Shaking him gently, he awoke the sleeping sentinel, who at once bawled, "Don't shoot!" to the great consternation of the nearest campers, who came flying out of their blankets to see what was the matter. When explanations had been made, all laughed, stretched themselves, and then went to bed again to dream of Missouri raiders.

The sun was well up in the sky next day, when the emigrants, having completed their purchases, yoked their oxen and drove up through the settlement and ascended the rolling swale of land that lay beyond the groves skirting the river. Here were camps of other emigrants who had moved out of Quindaro before them, or had come down from the point on the Missouri opposite Parkville, in order to get on to the road that led westward and south of the Kaw. It was a beautifully wooded country. When the lads admired the trees, Mr. Howell somewhat contemptuously said: "Not much good, chiefly black-jacks and scrub-oaks"; but the woods were pleasant to drive through, and when they came upon scattered farms and plantations with comfortable log-cabins set in the midst of cultivated fields, the admiration of the party was excited.

"Only look, Uncle Charlie," cried Sandy, "there's a real flower-garden full of hollyhocks and marigolds; and there's a rose-bush climbing over that log-cabin!" It was too early to distinguish one flower from another by its blooms, but Sandy's sharp eyes had detected the leaves of the old-fashioned flowers that he loved so well, which he knew were only just planted in the farther northern air of their home in Illinois. It was a pleasant-looking Kansas home, and Sandy wondered how it happened that this cosy living-place had grown up so quickly in this new Territory. It looked as if it were many years old, he said.

"We are still on the Delaware Indian reservation," replied his uncle. "The Government has given the tribe a big tract of land here and away up to the Kaw. They've been here for years, and they are good farmers, I should say, judging from the looks of things hereabouts."

Just then, as if to explain matters, a decent-looking man, dressed in the rude fashion of the frontier, but in civilized clothes, came out of the cabin, and, pipe in mouth, stared not unkindly at the passing wagon and its party.

"Howdy," he civilly replied to a friendly greeting from Mr. Howell. The boys knew that "How" was a customary salutation among Indians, but "Howdy" struck them as being comic; Sandy laughed as he turned away his face. Mr. Bryant lingered while the slow-moving oxen plodded their way along the road, and the boys, too, halted to hear what the dark-skinned man had to say. But the Indian—for he was a "civilized" Delaware—was a man of very few words. In answer to Mr. Bryant's questions, he said he was one of the chiefs of the tribe; he had been to Washington to settle the terms of an agreement with the Government; and he had lived in that cabin six years, and on the present reservation ever since it was established.

All this information came out reluctantly, and with as little use of vital breath as possible. When they had moved on out of earshot, Oscar expressed his decided opinion that that settler was no more like James Fenimore Cooper's Indians than the lovely Quindaro appeared to be. "Why, did you notice, father," he continued, "that he actually had on high-heeled boots? Think of that! An Indian with high-heeled boots! Why, in Cooper's novels they wear moccasins, and some of them go barefoot. These Indians are not worthy of the name."

"You will see more of the same sort before we get to the river," said his father. "They have a meeting-house up yonder, by the fork of the road, I am told. And, seeing that this is our first day out of camp on the last stage of our journey, suppose we stop for dinner at Indian John's, Aleck? It will be a change from camp-fare, and they say that John keeps a good table."

To the delight of the lads, it was agreed that they should make the halt as suggested, and noon found them at a very large and comfortable "double cabin," as these peculiar structures are called. Two log-cabins are built, end to end, with one roof covering the two. The passage between them is floored over, and affords an open shelter from rain and sun, and in hot weather is the pleasantest

place about the establishment. Indian John's cabin was built of hewn logs, nicely chinked in with slivers, and daubed with clay to keep out the wintry blasts. As is the manner of the country, one of the cabins was used for the rooms of the family, while the dining-room and kitchen were in the other end of the structure. Indian John regularly furnished dinner to the stage passengers going westward from Quindaro; for a public conveyance, a "mud-wagon," as it was called, had been put on this part of the road.

"What a tuck-out I had!" said Sandy, after a very bountiful and well-cooked dinner had been disposed of by the party. "And who would have supposed we should ever sit down to an Indian's table and eat fried chicken, ham and eggs, and corn-dodger, from a regular set of blue-and-white plates, and drink good coffee from crockery cups? It just beats Father Dixon's Indian stories all to pieces."

Oscar and Charlie, however, were disposed to think very lightly of this sort of Indian civilization. Oscar said: "If these red men were either one thing or the other, I wouldn't mind it. But they have shed the gaudy trappings of the wild Indian, and their new clothes do not fit very well. As Grandfather Bryant used to say, they are neither fish nor flesh, nor good red herring. They are a mighty uninteresting lot."

"Well, they are on the way to a better state of things than they have known, anyhow," said Charlie. "The next generation will see them higher up, I guess. But I must say that these farms don't look very thrifty, somehow. Indians are a lazy lot; they don't like work. Did you notice how all those big fellows at dinner sat down with us and the stage passengers, and the poor women had to wait on everybody? That's Indian."

Uncle Charlie laughed, and said that the boys had expected to find civilized Indians waiting on the table, decked out with paint and feathers, and wearing deerskin leggings and such like.

"Wait until we get out on the frontier," said he, "and then you will see wild Indians, perhaps, or 'blanket Indians,' anyhow."

"Blanket Indians?" said Sandy, with an interrogation point in his face.

"Yes; that's what the roving and unsettled bands are called by white folks. Those that are on reservations and earning their own living, or a part of it,—for the Government helps them out considerably,—are called town Indians; those that live in wigwams, or tepees, and rove from place to place, subsisting on what they can catch, are blanket Indians. They tell me that there are wild Indians out on the western frontier. But they are not hostile; at least, they were not, at last accounts. The Cheyennes have been rather uneasy, they say, since the white settlers began to pour into the country. Just now I am more concerned about the white Missourians than I am about the red aborigines."

They were still on the Delaware reservation when they camped that evening, and the boys went into the woods to gather fuel for their fire.

They had not gone far, when Sandy gave a wild whoop of alarm, jumping about six feet backward as he yelled, "A rattlesnake!" Sure enough, an immense snake was sliding out from under a mass of brush that the boy had disturbed as he gathered an armful of dry branches and twigs. Dropping his burden, Sandy shouted, "Kill him! Kill him, quick!"

The reptile was about five feet long, very thick, and of a dark mottled color. Instantly, each lad had armed himself with a big stick and had attacked him. The snake, stopped in his attempt to get away, turned, and opening his ugly-looking mouth, made a curious blowing noise, half a hiss and half a cough, as Charlie afterward described it.

"Take care, Sandy! He'll spring at you, and bite you in the face! See! He's getting ready to spring!"

And, indeed, the creature, frightened, and surrounded by the agile, jumping boys, each armed with a club, seemed ready to defend his life with the best weapons at his command. The boys, excited and alarmed, were afraid to come near the snake, and were dancing about, waiting for a chance to strike, when they were startled by a shot from behind them, and the snake, making one more effort to turn on himself, shuddered and fell dead.

Mr. Howell, hearing the shouting of the boys, had run out of the camp, and with a well-directed rifle shot had laid low the reptile.

“It’s only a blow-snake,” he said, taking the creature by the tail and holding it up to view. “He’s harmless. Well! Of course a dead snake is harmless, but when he was alive he was not the sort of critter to be afraid of. I thought you had encountered a bear, at the very least, by the racket you made.”

“He’s a big fellow, anyhow,” said Oscar, giving the snake a kick, “and Sandy said he was a rattlesnake. I saw a rattler once when we lived in Dixon. Billy Everett and I found him down on the bluff below the railroad; and he was spotted all over. Besides, this fellow hasn’t any rattles.”

“The boys have been having a lesson in natural history, Charlie,” said Mr. Howell to his brother-in-law, as they returned with him to camp, loaded with firewood; Sandy, boy-like, dragging the dead blow-snake after him.

CHAPTER V. TIDINGS FROM THE FRONT

Supper was over, a camp-fire built (for the emigrants did their cooking by a small camp-stove, and sat by the light of a fire on the ground), when out of the darkness came sounds of advancing teams. Oscar was playing his violin, trying to pick out a tune for the better singing of Whittier's song of the Kansas Emigrants. His father raised his hand to command silence. "That's a Yankee teamster, I'll be bound," he said, as the "Woh-hysh! Woh-haw!" of the coming party fell on his ear. "No Missourian ever talks to his cattle like that."

As he spoke, a long, low emigrant wagon, or "prairie schooner," drawn by three yoke of dun-colored oxen, toiled up the road. In the wagon was a faded-looking woman with two small children clinging to her. Odds and ends of household furniture showed themselves over her head from within the wagon, and strapped on behind was a coop of fowls, from which came a melancholy cackle, as if the hens and chickens were weary of their long journey. A man dressed in butternut-colored homespun drove the oxen, and a boy about ten years old trudged behind the driver. In the darkness behind these tramped a small herd of cows and oxen driven by two other men, and a lad about the age of Oscar Bryant. The new arrivals paused in the road, surveyed our friends from Illinois, stopped the herd of cattle, and then the man who was driving the wagon said, with an unmistakable New England twang, "Friends?"

"Friends, most assuredly," said Mr. Bryant, with a smile. "I guess you have been having hard luck, you appear to be so suspicious."

"Well, we have, and that's a fact. But we're main glad to be able to camp among friends. Jotham, unyoke the cattle after you have driven them into the timber a piece." He assisted the woman and children to get down from the wagon, and one of the cattle-drivers coming up, drove the team into the woods a short distance, and the tired oxen were soon lying down among the underbrush.

"Well, yes, we *have* had a pretty hard time getting here. We are the last free-State men allowed over the ferry at Parkville. Where be you from?"

"We are from Lee County, Illinois," replied Mr. Bryant. "We came in by the way of Parkville, too, a day or two ago; but we stopped at Quindaro. Did you come direct from Parkville?"

"Yes," replied the man. "We came up the river in the first place, on the steamboat 'Black Eagle,' and when we got to Leavenworth, a big crowd of Borderers, seeing us and another lot of free-State men on the boat, refused to let us land. We had to go down the river again. The captain of the boat kicked up a great fuss about it, and wanted to put us ashore on the other side of the river; but the Missouri men wouldn't have it. They put a 'committee,' as they called the two men, on board the steamboat, and they made the skipper take us down the river."

"How far down did you go?" asked Bryant, his face reddening with anger.

"Well, we told the committee that we came through Ioway, and that to Ioway we must go; so they rather let up on us, and set us ashore just opposite Wyandotte. I was mighty 'fraid they'd make us swear we wouldn't go back into Kansas some other way; but they didn't, and so we stivered along the road eastwards after they set us ashore, and then we fetched a half-circle around and got into Parkville."

"I shouldn't wonder if you bought those clothes that you have got on at Parkville," said Mr. Howell, with a smile.

"You guess about right," said the sad-colored stranger. "A very nice sort of a man we met at the fork of the road, as you turn off to go to Parkville from the river road, told me that my clothes were too Yankee. I wore 'em all the way from Woburn, Massachusetts, where we came from, and I hated to give 'em up. But discretion is better than valor, I have heern tell; so I made the trade, and here I am."

“We had no difficulty getting across at Parkville,” said Mr. Bryant, “except that we did have to go over in the night in a sneaking fashion that I did not like.”

“Well,” answered the stranger, “as a special favor, they let us across, seeing that we had had such hard luck. That’s a nice-looking fiddle you’ve got there, sonny,” he abruptly interjected, as he took Oscar’s violin from his unwilling hand. “I used to play the fiddle once, myself,” he added. Then, drawing the bow over the strings in a light and artistic manner, he began to play “Bonnie Doon.”

“Come, John,” his wife said wearily, “it’s time the children were under cover. Let go the fiddle until we’ve had supper.”

John reluctantly handed back the violin, and the newcomers were soon in the midst of their preparations for the night’s rest. Later on in the evening, John Clark, as the head of the party introduced himself, came over to the Dixon camp, and gave them all the news. Clark was one of those who had been helped by the New England Emigrant Aid Society, an organization with headquarters in the Eastern States, and with agents in the West. He had been fitted out at Council Bluffs, Iowa, but for some unexplained reason had wandered down as far south as Kansas City, and there had boarded the “Black Eagle” with his family and outfit. One of the two men with him was his brother; the other was a neighbor who had cast in his lot with him. The tall lad was John Clark’s nephew.

In one way or another, Clark had managed to pick up much gossip about the country and what was going on. At Tecumseh, where they would be due in a day or two if they continued on this road, an election for county officers was to be held soon, and the Missourians were bound to get in there and carry the election. Clark thought they had better not go straight forward into danger. They could turn off, and go west by way of Topeka.

“Why, that would be worse than going to Tecumseh,” interjected Charlie, who had modestly kept out of the discussion. “Topeka is the free-State capital, and they say that there is sure to be a big battle there, sooner or later.”

But Mr. Bryant resolved that he would go west by the way of Tecumseh, no matter if fifty thousand Borderers were encamped there. He asked the stranger if he had in view any definite point; to which Clark replied that he had been thinking of going up the Little Blue; he had heard that there was plenty of good vacant land there, and the land office would open soon. He had intended, he said, to go to Manhattan, and start from there; but since they had been so cowardly as to change the name of the place, he had “rather soured on it.”

“Manhattan?” exclaimed Charlie, eagerly. “Where is that place? We have asked a good many people, but nobody can tell us.”

“Good reason why; they’ve gone and changed the name. It used to be Boston, but the settlers around there were largely from Missouri. The company were Eastern men, and when they settled on the name of Boston, it got around that they were all abolitionists; and so they changed it to Manhattan. Why they didn’t call it New York, and be done with it, is more than I can tell. But it was Boston, and it is Manhattan; and that’s all I want to know about *that* place.”

Mr. Bryant was equally sure that he did not want to have anything to do with a place that had changed its name through fear of anybody or anything.

Next day there was a general changing of minds, however. It was Sunday, and the emigrants, a God-fearing and reverent lot of people, did not move out of camp. Others had come in during the night, for this was a famous camping-place, well known throughout all the region. Here were wood, water, and grass, the three requisites for campers, as they had already found. The country was undulating, interlaced with creeks; and groves of black-jack, oak, and cottonwood were here and there broken by open glades that would be smiling fields some day, but were now wild native grasses.

There was a preacher in the camp, a good man from New England, who preached about the Pilgrim’s Progress through the world, and the trials he meets by the way. Oscar pulled his father’s sleeve, and asked why he did not ask the preacher to give out “The Kansas Emigrant’s Song” as a hymn. Mr. Bryant smiled, and whispered that it was hardly likely that the lines would be considered

just the thing for a religious service. But after the preaching was over, and the little company was breaking up, he told the preacher what Oscar had said. The minister's eyes sparkled, and he replied, "What? Have you that beautiful hymn? Let us have it now and here. Nothing could be better for this day and this time."

Oscar, blushing with excitement and native modesty, was put up high on the stump of a tree, and, violin in hand, "raised the tune." It was grand old "Dundee." Almost everybody seemed to know the words of Whittier's poem, and beneath the blue Kansas sky, amid the groves of Kansas trees, the sturdy, hardy men and the few pale women joyfully, almost tearfully, sang,—

We'll tread the prairie as of old
Our fathers sailed the sea,
And make the West, as they the East,
The homestead of the free!

No pause, nor rest, save where the streams
That feed the Kansas run,
Save where our pilgrim gonfalon
Shall flout the setting sun!

Upbearing, like the Ark of old,
The Bible in our van,
We go to test the truth of God
Against the fraud of man.

We go to plant her common schools
On distant prairie swells,
And give the Sabbaths of the wild
The music of her bells.

We're flowing from our native hills
As our free rivers flow;
The blessing of our Mother-land
Is on us as we go.

We go to rear a wall of men
On freedom's Southern line,
And plant beside the cotton-tree
The rugged Northern pine!

We crossed the prairie, as of old
The pilgrims crossed the sea,
To make the West, as they the East,
The homestead of the free!

"It was good to be there," said Alexander Howell, his hand resting lovingly on Oscar's shoulder, as they went back to camp. But Oscar's father said never a word. His face was turned to the westward, where the sunlight was fading behind the hills of the far-off frontier of the Promised Land.

The general opinion gathered that day was that they who wanted to fight for freedom might better go to Lawrence, or to Topeka. Those who were bent on finding homes for themselves and little

ones should press on further to the west, where there was land in plenty to be had for the asking, or, rather, for the pre-empting. So, when Monday morning came, wet, murky, and depressing, Bryant surrendered to the counsels of his brother-in-law and the unspoken wish of the boys, and agreed to go on to the newly-surveyed lands on the tributaries of the Kaw. They had heard good reports of the region lying westward of Manhattan and Fort Riley. The town that had changed its name was laid out at the confluence of the Kaw and the Big Blue. Fort Riley was some eighteen or twenty miles to the westward, near the junction of the streams that form the Kaw, known as Smoky Hill Fork and the Republican Fork. On one or the other of these forks, the valleys of which were said to be fertile and beautiful beyond description, the emigrants would find a home. So, braced and inspired by the consciousness of having a definite and settled plan, the Dixon party set forth on Monday morning, through the rain and mist, with faces to the westward.

CHAPTER VI. WESTWARD HO!

The following two or three days were wet and uncomfortable. Rain fell in torrents at times, and when it did not rain the ground was steamy, and the emigrants had a hard time to find spots dry enough on which to make up their beds at night. This was no holiday journey, and the boys, too proud to murmur, exchanged significant nods and winks when they found themselves overtaken by the discomforts of camping and travelling in the storm. For the most part, they kept in camp during the heaviest of the rain. They found that the yokes of the oxen chafed the poor animals' necks when wet.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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