CHARLES BURDETT

LIFE OF KIT CARSON, THE GREAT WESTERN HUNTER AND GUIDE

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Burdett C.

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Содержание

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PREFACE

In offering to the public a revised and complete history of the most remarkable of American frontiersmen, we perform a pleasing task. All the attainable circumstances connected with his life, adventures and death are fully set forth, and we offer this in confidence as a reliable authority for the reader.

No one should hesitate to familiarize himself with the exploits of the subject of this volume. They evince a magnanimity and an uprightness of character that is rarely found in one leading so daring and intensely wild a life, and cannot but contribute their share of lustre to the interesting records of the Far West. We regret that his modesty, equally proverbial with his daring, prompted him to withhold many of the exciting incidents of his career from the public.

We have compiled a portion of this work from such official reports of his great skill, indomitable energy, and unfaltering courage as have been communicated by his friend and commander, Col. Fremont, who has invariably awarded to him all the best attributes of manhood, when opportunity afforded. Added to these, our hero had been prevailed upon by a few of his friends to communicate some of the records of the most important passages in his extraordinary and eventful life, which are embodied in this volume.

His has indeed been a life of peculiarly exciting personal hazards, bold adventures, daring coolness, and moral and physical courage, such as has seldom transpired in the world, and we have been greatly impressed, in its preparation, with the necessity for a thorough work of this kind. All are aware that the young, and even matured, often seek for books of wild adventure, and if those of an unhurtful and truthful character are not found, they are apt to betake themselves to trashy and damaging literature. In this view, this work has a purpose which, we trust, will commend it to every family throughout the land.

CHAPTER I

As, for their intrepid boldness and stern truthfulness, the exploits and deeds of the old Danish sea-kings, have, since the age of Canute, been justly heralded in song and story; so now by the world-wide voice of the press, this, their descendant, as his name proves him, is brought before the world: and as the stern integrity of the exploits and deeds of the old Danes in the age of Canute were heralded by song and story; so too, in this brief and imperfect memoir, are those of one who by name and birthright claims descent from them. The subject of the present memoir, Christopher Carson, familiarly known under the appellation of Kit Carson, is one of the most extraordinary men of the present era. His fame has long been established throughout this country and Europe, as a most skillful and intrepid hunter, trapper, guide, and pilot of the prairies and mountains of the far West, and Indian fighter. But his celebrity in these characters is far surpassed by that of his individual personal traits of courage, coolness, fidelity, kindness, honor, and friendship. The theatre of his exploits is extended throughout the whole western portion of the territory of the United States, from the Mississippi to the Pacific, and his associates have been some of the most distinguished men of the present age, to all of whom he has become an object of affectionate regard and marked respect. The narrative which follows will show his titles to this distinction, so far as his modesty (for the truly brave are always modest) has permitted the world to learn anything of his history.

It appears, from the various declarations of those most intimate with Christopher Carson, as well as from a biography published a number of years before his death, that he was a native of Madison county, Kentucky, and was born on the 24th of December, 1809. Colonel Fremont in his exhaustive and interesting Report of his Exploring Expedition to Oregon and North California, in 1843-44, says that Carson is a native of Boonslick county, Missouri; and from his long association with the hunter, he probably makes the statement on Carson's own authority. The error, if it is an error, may have arisen from the fact stated by Mr. Peters, that Carson's father moved from Kentucky to Missouri, when Christopher was only one year old. He settled in what is now Howard county, in the central part of Missouri.

At the time of Mr. Carson's emigration, Missouri was called Upper Louisiana, being a part of the territory ceded to the United States by France in 1803, and it became a separate State, under the name of Missouri, in 1821. When Mr. Carson removed his family from Kentucky, and settled in the new territory, it was a wild region, naturally fertile, thus favoring his views as a cultivator; abounding in wild game, and affording a splendid field of enterprise for the hunter, but infested on all sides with Indians, often hostile, and always treacherous.

As Mr. Carson united the pursuits of farmer and hunter, and lived in a sort of block-house or fort, as a precaution against the attacks of the neighboring Indians, his son became accustomed to the presence of danger, and the necessity of earnest action and industry from his earliest childhood.

At the age of fifteen, Kit Carson was apprenticed to Mr. Workman, a saddler. This trade requiring close confinement, was, of course, utterly distasteful to a boy already accustomed to the use of the rifle, and the stirring pleasures of the hunter's life, and at the end of two years, his apprenticeship was terminated, for Kit, who, with his experience as the son of a noted hunter, himself perfectly familiar with the rifle, and, young as he was, acknowledged to be one of the best and surest shots, even in that State, where such merit predominated at that time over almost every other, could not bear in patience the silent, sedentary monotony of his life, voluntarily abandoned the further pursuit of the trade, and sought the more active employment of a trader's life.

His new pursuit was more congenial. He joined an armed band of traders in an expedition to Santa Fe, the capital of New Mexico. This, at that period, (1826,) was rather a perilous undertaking, on account of the Indian tribes who were ever ready to attack a trading caravan, when there was any prospect of overcoming it. No attack was made on the party, however, and no incident of importance

occurred, if we except the accident to one of the teamsters who wounded himself by carelessly handling a loaded rifle, so as to render it necessary to amputate his arm. In this operation Carson assisted, the surgical instruments being a razor, an old saw, and an iron bolt, heated red hot, in order to apply the actual cautery. Notwithstanding this rough surgery, the man recovered.[1]

In November (1826) the party arrived at Santa Fe, the capital, and the largest town in the then Mexican province of New Mexico. This place is situated on the Rio Chiuto, or Santa Fe river, an affluent of the Rio Grande, from which it is distant about 20 miles. It was then, as now, the great emporium of the overland trade, which, since 1822, has been carried on with the State of Missouri. The houses are chiefly built of *adobes*, or unburnt bricks, each dwelling forming a square, with a court in the centre upon which the apartments open. This mode of building, originally Moorish, prevails in all the colonies settled by the Spaniards, as well as in Old Spain, and the oriental countries. It makes each house a sort of fortress, as General Taylor's troops learned to their cost at the siege of Monterey. The front entrance of each house is large enough to admit animals with their packs.

Santa Fe is well supplied with cool water from springs within its limits, and from fountains above the city near the neighbouring mountain. The appearance of the place is inviting and imposing, as it stands on a plateau elevated more than 7000 feet above the sea, and near a snow capped mountain, which rises 5000 feet above the level of the town; but the population is said to be exceedingly depraved. The present population is about 5000; but at the time of Carson's first visit, it was comparatively a small town.

Soon after their arrival at Santa Fe, Carson left the trading band, which he had joined when he abandoned the saddlery business, or trade, as the reader may choose to term it, and of which we have previously spoken, and proceeded to Fernandez de Taos. In this place Carson passed the winter of 1826-7, at the house of a retired mountaineer. And it was while residing there, that he acquired that thorough familiarity with the Spanish language, which, in after years, proved of such essential service to him. In the spring he joined a party bound for Missouri, but meeting another band of Santa Fe traders, he joined them and returned to that place. Here his services being no longer required by the traders, he was again thrown out of employment. He now engaged himself as teamster to a party bound to El Paso, a settlement, or more properly a line of settlements, embracing a population of about 5,000, situated in the rich, narrow valley which extends 9 or 10 miles along the right bank of the Rio Grande, in the Mexican State of Chihuahua, 350 miles S. by W. of Santa Fe. Here the grape is extensively cultivated, and considerable quantities of light wine and brandy, (called by the traders *Pass wine* and *Pass brandy*,) are made. The houses are like those of Santa Fe, built of *adobes* with earthen floors. With abundance of natural advantages, the people are content to live without those appliances of civilized life, considered indispensable by the poorest American citizens. Glazed windows, chairs, tables, knives and forks, and similar every day conveniences are unknown even to the rich among the people of El Paso. The place is the chief emporium of the trade between New Mexico and Chihuahua, and its name, "the passage" is derived from the passage of the river through a gorge or gap in the mountain just above the town.

On his arrival at this place, young Carson might justly be considered in view of his age, (not yet 18,) more than an ordinary traveler. He had arrived at a spot where everything was strange to him. New people, new customs, a new climate, a wine country, a population of mixed breed, half Indian, half Spaniard – everything wearing a foreign aspect; everything totally different from his home in Missouri.

He did not remain long in this place, but returned to Santa Fe, whence he again found his way to Taos, where he passed the winter in the service of Mr. Ewing Young, in the humble capacity of cook; this he soon forsook for the more pleasant and profitable position of Spanish interpreter to a trader named Tramell, with whom he, for the second time, made the long journey to El Paso and Chihuahua.

[1] Peters.

CHAPTER II

Chihuahua, where Carson had now arrived, is the capital of the Mexican province bearing the same name. It is situated on a small tributary of the Conchos river, in the midst of a plain. It is regularly laid out and well built; the streets are broad and some of them paved. Like other cities built by the Spaniards, it has its great public square, or Plaza Major, on one side of which stands the cathedral, an imposing edifice of hewn stone, built at a cost of $300,000. It is surmounted with a dome and two towers, and has a handsome façade with statues of the twelve apostles, probably the first statues that Carson had ever seen. Other public buildings surround the square, and there is a fountain in the middle. The city contains a convent founded by the Jesuits, and an aqueduct 3-1/2 miles long, supported by vast arches and communicating with the river Chihuahua. It has also its mint, and in the neighborhood are silver mines with furnaces for melting the ore. It carries on an extensive trade with the United States by means of caravans to St. Louis in Missouri, and San Antonio in Texas. It was founded in 1691, and during the time when the silver mines were in successful operation, it contained 70,000 inhabitants. The population at present is 14,000.

As he had come with one of the trading caravans in the service of Colonel Tramell as Spanish interpreter, we might naturally expect that the engagement would be a permanent one. But such was not the case. The monotony of this life soon disgusted him, and after weary weeks passed in comparative idleness, he longed again for the freedom of the prairie and the forest, and gladly abandoning the rather dignified position of interpreter to Colonel Tramell, entered into the service of Mr. Robert M. Knight, in the more humble capacity of teamster in an expedition to the copper mines on the river Gila, whence he soon after found his way back to Taos.

It was during this visit to Taos that Carson was first enabled to gratify the desire which he had long entertained of becoming a regular hunter and trapper. A party of trappers in the service of Carson's old friend, Mr. Ewing Young, had returned to Taos, having been beaten off from their hunting and trapping grounds by a hostile band of Indians. Mr. Young raised a party of forty men, for the double purpose of chastising the Indians, and resuming the business of trapping, and Carson joined them. The fact that he was accepted for this service was a marked token of esteem for his valor, as well as his skill in hunting, parties of this description always avoiding the enlistment of inexperienced recruits, as likely to embarrass their operations in the field.

The ostensible object of the expedition was to punish the Indians, but its ultimate purpose was to trap for beavers. The Mexicans by an express law had forbidden granting licenses to any American parties, and in this instance a circuitous route was chosen to conceal their real design.

They did not fall in with the Indians of whom they were in pursuit, until they had reached the head of one of the affluents of the Rio Gila, called Salt River. Once in presence of their enemies they made short work with them, killing fifteen of their warriors, and putting the whole band to rout. Such occurrences were by no means unfrequent, as we shall see in the course of this narrative. A small body of experienced hunters and trappers, confident in their superior skill and discipline, never hesitates to attack a greatly superior number of Indians, and it was a rare thing that success did not attend their daring. The Indian is not fond of a "fair stand up fight." He prefers stratagem and ambush, and reverences as a great "brave," the warrior who is most successful in circumventing his enemies, and bringing off many scalps without the loss of a man; but when a considerable number of Indians are shot down in the first onset, the remainder are very apt to take to flight in every direction.

We have said that Carson joined the party of trappers under the command of Mr. Ewing Young, and it may not be out of place to describe briefly the mode of life which parties in that pursuit have to adopt, with a few remarks upon the habits and haunts of the animal, for whose sake men were then so willing to risk their lives, and to undergo such hardships.

The method of trapping for beaver formerly employed by the trappers in the western country, is thus described by one who has had considerable experience in the art; and we quote it as illustrating the severe training to which Carson had voluntarily subjected himself:

"To be a successful trapper, required great caution as well as a perfect knowledge of the habits of the animal. The residence of the beaver was often discovered by seeing bits of green wood, and gnawed branches of the bass-wood, slippery elm, and sycamore, their favorite food, floating on the water, or lodged on the shores of the stream below, as well as by their tracks or foot-marks. These indications were technically called *beaver sign*. They were also sometimes discovered by their dams, thrown across creeks and small sluggish streams, forming a pond in which were erected their habitations.

"The hunter, as he proceeded to set his traps, generally approached by water, in his canoe. He selected a steep, abrupt spot in the bank of the creek, in which a hole was excavated with his paddle, as he sat in the canoe, sufficiently large to hold the trap, and so deep as to be about three inches below the surface of the water, when the jaws of the trap were expanded. About two feet above the trap, a stick, three or four inches in length, was stuck in the bank. In the upper end of this, the trapper excavated a small hole with his knife, into which he dropped a small quantity of the essence, or perfume, which was used to attract the beaver to the spot. This stick was attached by a string of horse hair to the trap, and with it was pulled into the water by the beaver. The reason for this was, that it might not remain after the trap was sprung, and attract other beavers to the spot, and thus prevent their going to where there was another trap ready for them.

"The scent, or essence, was made by mingling the fresh castor of the beaver, with an extract of the bark of the roots of the spice-bush, and kept in a bottle for use. The making of this essence was held a profound secret, and often sold for a considerable sum to the younger trappers, by the older proficients in the mystery of beaver hunting. Where they had no proper bait, they sometimes made use of the fresh roots of sassafras, or spice-bush; of both these the beaver was very fond.

"It is said by old trappers that they will smell the well-prepared essence the distance of a mile. Their sense of smell is very acute, or they would not so readily detect the vicinity of man by the smell of his trail. The aroma of the essence having attracted the animal into the vicinity of the trap, in his attempt to reach it, he has to climb up on to the bank where it is sticking. This effort leads him directly over the trap, and he is usually taken by one of the fore legs. The trap was connected by a chain of iron, six feet in length, to a stout line made of the bark of the leather-wood, twisted into a neat cord, of fifteen or twenty feet. These were usually prepared by the trappers at home or at their camps, for cords of hemp or flax were scarce in the days of beaver hunting. The end of the line was secured to a stake driven into the bed of the creek under water, and in his struggles to escape, the beaver was usually drowned before the arrival of the trapper. Sometimes, however, he freed himself by gnawing off his own leg, though this was rarely the case. If there was a prospect of rain, or it was raining at the time of setting the trap, a leaf, generally of sycamore, was placed over the essence stick, to protect it from the rain.

"The beaver being a very sagacious and cautious animal, it required great care in the trapper in his approach to its haunts to set his traps, that no scent of his feet or hands was left on the earth, or bushes that he touched. For this reason he generally approached in a canoe. If he had no canoe, it was necessary to enter the stream thirty or forty yards below, and walk in the water to the place, taking care to return in the same manner, lest the beaver should take alarm and not come near the bait, as his fear of the vicinity of man was greater than his sense of appetite for the essence. It also required caution in kindling a fire near their haunts, as the smell of smoke alarmed them. The firing of a gun, also, often marred the sport of the trapper, and thus it will be seen that to make a successful beaver hunter, required more qualities or natural gifts than fall to the share of most men."

CHAPTER III

Carson's previous habits and pursuits had eminently qualified him to become an useful and even a distinguished member of Mr. Young's company of trappers. He had lived in the midst of danger from his childhood. He was familiar with the use of arms; and several years of travel and adventure had already given him more knowledge of the western wilds in the neighborhood of the region which was the scene of their present operations, than was possessed by many who had seen more years than himself. Added to this, he had become well acquainted with the peculiar character and habits of the western Indians, who were now prowling around their camp, and occasionally stealing their traps, game, and animals.

The party pursued their business successfully for some time on the Salt and San Francisco rivers, when a part of them returned to New Mexico, and the remainder, eighteen in number, under the lead of Mr. Young, started for the valley of Sacramento, California, and it was to this latter party Carson was attached. Their route led them through one of the dry deserts of the country, and not only did they suffer considerably from the want of water, but their provisions giving out, they were often happy when they could make a good dinner on horse-flesh. Near the Cañon of the Colorado they encountered a party of Mohave Indians, who furnished them with some provisions, which relieved them from the apprehension of immediate want.

The Mohave Indians are thus described by a recent visitor:

"These Indians are probably in as wild a state of nature as any tribe on American territory. They have not had sufficient intercourse with any civilized people, to acquire a knowledge of their language, or their vices. It was said that no white party had ever before passed through their country without encountering hostility; nevertheless they appear intelligent, and to have naturally amiable dispositions. The men are tall, erect, and well-proportioned; their features inclined to European regularity; their eyes large, shaded by long lashes, and surrounded by circles of blue pigment, that add to their apparent size. The apron, or breech-cloth for men, and a short petticoat, made of strips of the inner bark of the cotton-wood, for women, are the only articles of dress deemed indispensable; but many of the females have long robes, or cloaks, of fur. The young girls wear beads; but when married, their chins are tattooed with vertical blue lines, and they wear a necklace with a single sea-shell in front, curiously wrought. These shells are very ancient, and esteemed of great value.

"From time to time they rode into the camp, mounted on spirited horses; their bodies and limbs painted and oiled, so as to present the appearance of highly-polished mahogany. The dandies paint their faces perfectly black. Warriors add a streak of red across the forehead, nose, and chin. Their ornaments consist of leathern bracelets, adorned with bright buttons, and worn on the left arm; a kind of tunic, made of buckskin fringe, hanging from the shoulders; beautiful eagles' feathers, called 'sormeh' – sometimes white, sometimes of a crimson tint – tied to a lock of hair, and floating from the top of the head; and, finally, strings of wampum, made of circular pieces of shell, with holes in the centre, by which they are strung, often to the length of several yards, and worn in coils about the neck. These shell beads, which they call 'pook,' are their substitute for money, and the wealth of an individual is estimated by the 'pook' cash he possesses."

Soon after leaving the Mohave Indians, Mr. Young's party, proceeding westward, arrived at the Mission of San Gabriel. This is one of these extensive establishments formed by the Roman Catholic clergy in the early times of California, which form so striking a feature in the country. This Mission of San Gabriel, about the time of Carson's visit, was in a flourishing condition. By statistical accounts, in 1829, it had 70,000 head of cattle, 1,200 horses, 3,000 mares, 400 mules, 120 yoke of working cattle, and 254,000 sheep. From the vineyards of the mission were made 600 barrels of wine, the sale of which produced an income of upwards of $12,000. There were between twenty and thirty such missions in California at that time, of which San Gabriel was by no means the largest.

They had all been founded since 1769, when the first, San Diego, was established. The labor in these establishments was performed by Indian converts, who received in return a bare support, and a very small modicum of what was called religious instruction. Each mission had its Catholic priests, a few Spanish or Mexican soldiers, and hundreds, sometimes thousands of Indians.

The following interesting account of those of Upper California, we transcribe from a recent work of high authority.[2]

"The missions of Upper California were indebted for their beginning and chief success to the subscriptions which, as in the case of the missionary settlements of the lower province, were largely bestowed by the pious to promote so grand a work as turning a great country to the worship of the true God. Such subscriptions continued for a long period, both in Old and New Spain, and were regularly remitted to the City of Mexico, where they were formed into what was called '*The Pious Fund of California*.' This fund was managed by the convent of San Fernando and other trustees in Mexico, and the proceeds, together with the annual salaries allowed by the Crown to the missionaries, were transmitted to California. Meanwhile, the Spanish court scarcely interfered with the temporal government of the country. It was true that some of the ordinary civil offices and establishments were kept up; but this was only in name, and on too small a scale to be of any practical importance. A commandante-general was appointed by the Crown to command the garrisons of the presidios; but as these were originally established solely to protect the missions from the dreaded violence of hostile Indians, and to lend them, when necessary, the carnal arm of offence, he was not allowed to interfere in the temporal rule of the Fathers. He resided at Monterey, and his annual salary was four thousand dollars.

"In every sense of the word, then, these monks were practically the sovereign rulers of California – passing laws affecting not only property, but even life and death – declaring peace and war against their Indian neighbors – regulating, receiving, and spending the finances at discretion – and, in addition, drawing large annual subsidies not only from the pious among the faithful over all Christendom, but even from the Spanish monarchy itself, almost as a tribute to their being a superior state. This surely was the golden age of the missions – a contented, peaceful, believing people, abundant wealth for all their wants, despotic will, and no responsibility but to their own consciences and heaven! Their horn was filled to overflowing; but soon an invisible and merciless hand seized it, and slowly and lingeringly, as if in malicious sport, turned it over, and spilled the nectar of their life upon the wastes of mankind, from whence it can never again be collected. The golden age of another race has now dawned, and with it the real prosperity of the country.

"The missions were originally formed on the same general plan, and they were planted at such distances from each other as to allow abundant room for subsequent development. They were either established on the sea-coast, or a few miles inland. Twenty or thirty miles indeed seems all the distance the missionaries had proceeded into the interior; beyond which narrow belt the country was unexplored and unknown. Each mission had a considerable piece of the best land in the neighborhood set aside for its agricultural and pastoral purposes, which was commonly about fifteen miles square. But besides this selected territory, there was generally much more vacant land lying between the boundaries of the missions, and which, as the increase of their stocks required more space for grazing, was gradually occupied by the flocks and herds of the Fathers, nearest to whose mission lay the previously unoccupied district. Over these bounds the Fathers conducted all the operations of a gigantic farm. Their cattle generally numbered from ten thousand to twenty thousand and their sheep were nearly as numerous – though some missions had upwards of thrice these numbers – which fed over perhaps a hundred thousand acres of fertile land.

"Near the centre of such farms were placed the mission buildings. These consisted of the church – which was either built of stone, if that material could be procured in the vicinity, or of *adobes*,

[2] Annals of San Francisco. By Frank Soulé, John H Gihon, and James Nisbet. New York, D. Appleton & Co., 1855.

which are bricks dried in the sun; and was as substantial, large, and richly decorated an erection as the means of the mission would permit, or the skill and strength of their servants could construct. In the interior, pictures and hangings decorated the walls; while the altars were ornamented with marble pillars of various colors, and upon and near them stood various articles of massy gold and silver plate. A profusion of gilding and tawdry sparkling objects caught and pleased the eye of the simple congregations. Around, or beside the church, and often in the form of a square, were grouped the habitations of the Fathers and their household servants, and the various granaries and workshops of the people; while, at the distance of one or two hundred yards, stood the huts of the Indians. The former buildings were constructed of *adobes*, and covered with brick tiles, frail and miserable materials at the best. The huts of the Indians were occasionally made of the same materials, but more commonly were formed only of a few rough poles, stuck in the ground, with the points bending towards the centre like a cone, and were covered with reeds and grass. An *adobe* wall of considerable height sometimes inclosed the whole village. The direction of the affairs of the settlement was in the hands of one of the Fathers, originally called a president, but afterwards a *prefect*; and each prefect was independent in his own mission, and practically supreme in all its temporal, and nearly in all its spiritual matters, to any human authority.

"Thus the Fathers might be considered to have lived something in the style of the patriarchs of the days of Job and Abraham. They indeed were generally ignorant and unlettered men, knowing little more than the mechanical rites of their church, and what else their manuals of devotion and the treasuries of the lives of the saints taught them; but they seem to have been personally devout, self-denying, and beneficent in their own simple way. They thought they did God service, and perhaps much more the Indians themselves, in catching, taming, and converting them to Christianity. That was their vocation in the world, and they faithfully obeyed its calls of duty. Towards the converts and actually domesticated servants, they always showed such an affectionate kindness as a father pays to the youngest and most helpless of his family. The herds and flocks of the Fathers roamed undisturbed over numberless hills and valleys. Their servants or slaves were true born children of the house, who laboured lightly and pleasantly, and had no sense of freedom nor desire for change. A rude but bounteous hospitality marked the master's reception of the solitary wayfarer, as he traveled from mission to mission, perhaps bearing some scanty news from the outer world, all the more welcome that the Fathers knew little of the subject, and could not be affected by the events and dangers of distant societies. All these things have now passed away. The churches have fallen into decay, deserted by the old worshipers, and poverty-stricken; the *adobe* houses of the Fathers are in ruins – and there is scarcely any trace left of the slightly erected huts of the Indians, who themselves have deserted their old hearths and altars, and are silently, though rapidly, disappearing from the land. But the memory of the patriarchal times, for they were only as yesterday, still remains fresh in the minds of the early white settlers."

Mr. Young's party did not remain long to enjoy the sumptuous fare at the Mission of San Gabriel; but pushed on to that of San Fernando, and thence to the river and fertile valley of Sacramento. In this neighborhood they trapped for beaver, and Carson displayed his activity and skill as a hunter of deer, elk, and antelope.

CHAPTER IV

Only familiarity with one of like character, by actually seeing it, can give a just idea of the country through which they were traveling. Livingston's descriptions of localities in Central Africa might be transferred to our pages *verbatim*, to give a word-painting of the desiccated deserts of what is now New Mexico and Arizona. Carson's curiosity, as well as care to preserve the knowledge for future use, led him to note in memory, every feature of the wild landscape, its mountain chains, its desert prairies, with only clumps of the poor artemisia for vegetation, its rivers, and the oases upon their banks, where there were bottom-lands – nor were beaver found elsewhere – with its river beds whose streams had found a passage beneath the surface of the earth, and each other general feature that would attract the eye of the natural, rather than the scientific observer.

In our day, the note book of the pioneer furnishing the data, the traveler carries a guide-book to direct his course from point to point, upon a well trodden road, to those places where grass and water will furnish refreshment for his animals, while he regales himself, not upon the spare-rib of a starved mule, killed because it could go no longer, but upon a variety of good things from the well stocked larder of the pouches of the saddle-bags his pack mule carries, or the provision box of his wagon. Or, instead of the meat-diet of the trapper, when he has been in luck in a fertile locality, the traveler – not trapper – of to-day, perhaps has shot a prairie chicken, and prepares his dinner by making a stew of it, which he consumes with hard bread he has purchased at a station not ten miles away.

Familiarity with the features of the country does not restore the experience of the pioneer of these wilds. The Indian, now, is advised by authority he seldom dares defy, to keep off the roads of the emigrants; and seldom does a party leave the road for any great distance; nor are these roads infrequent, but the country is intersected with them, and the guide-books protect against mistake in taking the wrong direction. The test of character, however, with the trappers, was their ability to endure hardships when they had to be encountered; and to guard against them, when they could be avoided, by a wise foresight in taking advantage of every favor of fortune, and turning each freak or whim of the wily dame to best account.

Carson was delighted with California from the first, and realizing intense satisfaction in his position, yet a youth, on terms of easy familiarity with the other seventeen old trappers, especially selected for this expedition, circumstances conspired to call into play all the activities of his nature, and nothing intruded to prevent his resigning himself to the impulses of the time, and making the most of every occasion that offered.

He had the confidence of Capt. Young and of all his men, who permitted him to do precisely as he chose, for they found him not only intending always to do what was best, but possessed of foresight to know always "just the things that ought to be done," almost without effort, as it seemed to them.

After leaving the Mission of San Fernando, Young's party trapped upon the San Joaquim, but they found that another party of trappers had been there before them, employed by the Hudson Bay Company, in Oregon. There was however, room for them both, and they trapped near each other for weeks. The friendly intercourse kept up between the two parties, was not only one of pleasant interchange of social kindness, but in one sense was essentially useful to Kit, who lost no opportunity of improving himself in the profession (for in those days trapping was a profession) which he had embraced, and he had the benefit of the experience by way of example, not only of his own companions, but of those who were connected with the greatest and most influential company then in existence on this Continent. It is hardly necessary to say that he lost no opportunity of acquiring information, and it is quite probable that he would, if called on, allow that the experience acquired on this expedition was among the most valuable of any which he had previously gained.

When Mr. Young went to the Sacramento, he separated from the Hudson Bay party. The beautiful Sacramento, as its waters glided toward the chain of bays that take it to the ocean through

the Bay of San Francisco out at the Golden gate, had not the aspect of the eastern river's immediate tributaries of the Missouri. Its waters then were clear as crystal, and the salmon floated beneath, glistening in the sunlight, as the canoe glided through them.

The very air of this valley is luxurious; and in speaking of it, we will include the valley of the San Joaquim, for both these streams run parallel with the coast, the Sacramento from the north, the San Joaquim from the south, and both unite at the head of the chain of bays which pour their waters into the Pacific.

The Sacramento drains nearly three hundred miles of latitude, and the San Joaquim an hundred and fifty miles of the country bounded by the Sierra Nevada (snow mountains) on the east, and the coast range on the west, the whole forming a great basin, with the mountains depressed on the north and south, but with no outlet except through the Golden gate.

CHAPTER V

No climate could be more congenial to a full flow of animal spirits, than this region, where, upon the vegetation of the rich black soil – often twenty feet deep – game of the better class in great abundance found support. Deer in no part of the world was ever more plenty, and elk and antelope bounded through the old oak groves, as they may have done in Eden.

Carson had many opportunities of exploring the country, which he gladly embraced, and thus became familiar with many localities, the knowledge of which was in after years of such essential service to him and others.

There were many large tribes of Indians scattered through this country, in these and smaller valleys, beside those which the missions had attached to them. We know not that any record has been kept of the names of these tribes and their numbers; but since the white men intruded, they have melted away as did earlier those east of the Mississippi.

These Indians were all of the variety called Diggers, but in better condition than we see them, since the small remnants of large tribes have adopted the vices of the white men, and learned improvidence, by sometimes having plenty without much toil; so that they can say to-day, "No deer, no acorn; white man come! poor Indian hungry," as the happiest style of begging.

A brief description of the Tlamath or Digger Indians, and their mode of living, may not now be out of place, and having been visited by Carson in his earlier years, may not be uninteresting. We quote from the language of one who has paid a recent visit to the tribe:

"There were a dozen wigwams for the nearly hundred that composed the tribe, one of which was much larger than the rest, and in the centre of the group, the temple, or "medicine lodge." As we entered, the bones of game consumed, and other offal lay about; and to our inquiry why they did not clear away and be more tidy, only a grunt was returned. The men had gone fishing, said the Indian woman we addressed, so we saw but two or three; but in one wigwam which we entered there were fourteen with ourselves – the rest, besides the boy who went before to announce us, were women and children.

"We ascended a mound of earth, as it seemed, about six feet high, and through a circular hole, perhaps two feet and a half in diameter, descended a perpendicular ladder about ten feet. This opening, through which we entered, performed the double office of door and window to the space below, which was circular, about fourteen feet across, with arrangements for sleeping, like berths in a steamboat, one over another, on two sides, suspended by tying with bark a rough stick to upright posts, which served to hold the sticks that sustained the roof. The whole was substantially built, the covering being the earth which was taken from the spot beneath, heaped upon a layer of rushes, the floor of the wigwam being four feet below the surface of the ground. On the two sides of the wigwam not occupied by the berths, were barrels filled with fish – dried salmon, seeds, acorns, and roots.

"On hooks from the rush lined ceiling hung bags and baskets, containing such luxuries as dried grasshoppers and berries. About the berths hung deer skins and some skins of other game, seemingly prepared for wear. There was no appearance of other dress, yet in the berths sat three women, braiding strips of deer skin, and attaching the braids to a string, in the form of long fringe. Each of the women wore an apron of this kind about the waist, and only the dress of nature beside. The children were dressed '*in puris naturalibus*.'

"After stopping ten minutes, we were glad to ascend to the open air, for a sickness came over us from which we did not recover for several hours. How human beings live in such an atmosphere we cannot tell, but this is the way they habitate.

"When the grasshoppers were abundant, for this insect is one of the luxuries of the Diggers, they scoured the valley, gathering them in immense quantities. This is done by first digging holes or pits in the ground at the spot chosen. Then the whole party of Indians, each with the leafy branch of

a tree, form a circle about it and drive in the grasshoppers till they heap them upon each other in the pits: water is then poured in to drown them. Their booty gathered, they proceed to another place and perform the same operation. These insects are prepared for food by kindling a fire in one of these pits, and when it is heated, filling it with them and covering it with a heated stone, where they are left to bake. They are now ready for use at any time, and eaten with gusto, or they are powdered, and mixed with the acorn meal in a kind of bread, which is baked in the ashes."

To return to the camp of trappers, and witness one day's duties, may be gratifying to the reader. With early dawn the traps are visited, and the beaver secured. The traps are re-adjusted, and the game brought into camp – or left to be skinned where it is if the camp is far away. Meantime breakfast has been prepared by one of the party; others have looked after the animals, relieving the watch which is still kept up lest a stampede occur while all are sleeping. Carson could not be cook for the party constantly, but takes his turn with the rest, and by the nice browning of his steak, and the delicacy of his acorn coffee, and the addition to their meal of roasted kamas root, he proves the value of the apprenticeship of his earlier years. He has a dish of berries, too, and surprises the party with this tempting dessert, as well as with the information that in his rambles the day before he had dined with an old Californian, with his wife and daughters, and had the promise from them of a cow, if he would call for it on the morrow.

Breakfast over, and the remains put by for lunch at noon, Carson mounts his pony, and riding a few miles down the bank swims the river, and dashing out among the hills with a high round mountain peak in view, still miles away, is lost among the oak groves for a score of miles, and at length emerges on Susan bay, and doffs his hat and makes his bow to the young Señorita who greets him at the door with a smile of welcome. The sun is low; dinner waits – hot bread, and butter, and cheese, and coffee with sugar, are added to the venison and beef, and Irish and sweet potatoes. Amid the civilities and pleasant chat, the hour passes happily, and Carson proposes returning to his party.

The ladies will not allow him to depart. Will he not accept the hospitality of their mansion for a single night? They do not urge after one refusal, because his every feature indicates the decision of his character. He must go. His horse is brought – a young and beautiful animal – and the cow, this object of his second journey thither, given him in charge as he mounts, with a rope attached to her horns, by which to lead her. The full moon is rising, on which he had calculated, as he told his hostesses, and with words of pleasant compliment, with which the Spanish language so much more than ours abounds, and a *Buenos noches, señor*, from his entertainers, and *Buenos noches, señoritas*, in return, he slowly winds his silent way on and on through the oak groves and the wild oats covering the hill-sides, hearing only the song of the owl and the whippoorwill, the music of the insects, and the whispering leaves, but with ear ever open to detect the stealthy tread of the monster of the wood and hills – the grizzly bear. Off on the distant hill he sees one, with a cub following her; but game is plenty, and deer is good enough food for her. On, on he goes at slow pace, for he has a delicate charge, and already is she restive from very weariness, though his pace is slow.

Half his journey is completed as the gray of dawn and the twinkle of the star of morning relieves the tedium and anxiety of his loneliness. He has made the circuit of the bay. The river is before him as he descends the hill which he has ascended for observation. Morning broadens. The flowers glow with variegated beauty as he tramples them, and in some patches the odor of the crushed dewy beauties fills the air to satiety.

A few miles more of travel and he crosses the river, and is again in the river-bottom where the party have taken the beaver. He stops at an Indian village, and dines from the liberal haunch and the acorn bread the chief presents, and with good feelings displayed on either side, takes in his arms a young papoose, the digger's picaninny, and salutes it with a kiss. Kit leaves there a trifling, but to them, valuable memorial of his visit, mounts his sorrel which is restive under the slow gait to which he has restrained him, takes the rope again which secures his treasure, the cow, and plods towards home at evening. The camp fire smokes in the distance, while the few horses that remain are staked

about, and the sentinel paces up and down to keep off the drowsiness induced by fatigue and a hearty meat supper. The eastern and the western horizon are lighted with pale silver by the departing god of day, and the approaching goddess of the night, and the still river divides the plain, bounded only by the horizon, except he look behind him. Such is the scene as, approaching, the sentinel raises his gun and gives the challenge to halt. But the rest of the camp are not yet sleeping, and a dozen voices shout in the still evening a glad welcome to Carson, for whom they were not concerned, for they well knew there was not one of the party so well able to take care of himself as he.

CHAPTER VI

Peters, in his "Life of Carson," tells the story of two expeditions which Carson led against the Indians, while they trapped upon the Sacramento, which give proof of his courage, and thorough education in the art of Indian warfare, which had become a necessity to the *voyageur* on the plains, and in the mountains of the western wilds. With his quick discrimination of character, and familiarity with the habits of the race, he could not but know the diggers were less bold than the Apaches and Camanches, with whom he was before familiar.

The Indians at the Mission San Gabriel, were restive under coerced labor, and forty of them made their escape to a tribe not far away.

The mission demanded the return of these fugitives, and being refused, gave battle to the neighboring tribe, but were defeated. The Padre sent to the trappers for assistance to compel the Indians not to harbor their people. Carson and eleven of his companions volunteered to aid the mission, and the attack upon the Indian village resulted in the destruction of a third of its inhabitants, and compelled them to submission. Capt. Young found at this mission a trader to take his furs, and from them purchased a drove of horses. Directly after his return, a party of Indians contrived to drive away sixty horses from the trappers, while the sentinel slept at night. Carson with twelve men were sent in pursuit. It was not difficult to follow the fresh trail of so large a drove, yet he pursued them a hundred miles, and into the mountains, before coming up with them. The Indians supposed themselves too far away to be followed, and were feasting on the flesh of the stolen horses they had slaughtered. Carson's party arranged themselves silently and without being seen, and rushing upon the Indian camp, killed eight men, and scattered the remainder in every direction. The horses were recovered, except the six killed, and partly consumed, and with three Indian children left in camp, they returned to the joyful greetings of their friends.

Early in the autumn of 1829, Mr. Young and his party of trappers set out on their return home. On their route they visited Los Angelos, formerly called Pueblo de los Angelos, "the city of the angels," a name which it received on account of the exceedingly genial climate, and the beauty of the surrounding country. It is situated on a small river of the same name, 30 miles from its mouth, and on the road between the cities of San Jose and San Diego. It is about three hundred and fifty miles east of San Francisco, and a hundred miles to the south.

Although to very many thousands of readers, anything on the subject of the climate of California may seem superfluous, yet there are as many thousands who have no really distinct idea of the country or the climate, and we therefore quote from Rev. Dr. Bushnell, whose article on those topics in the "New Englander," in 1858, attracted justly such universal attention:

"The first and most difficult thing to apprehend respecting California is the climate, upon which, of course, depend the advantages of health and physical development, the growths and their conditions and kinds, and the *modus operandi*, or general cast, of the seasons. But this, again, is scarcely possible, without dismissing, first of all, the word *climate*, and substituting the plural, climates. For it cannot be said of California, as of New England, or the Middle States, that it has a climate. On the contrary, it has a great multitude, curiously pitched together, at short distances, one from another, defying too, not seldom, our most accepted notions of the effects of latitude and altitude and the defences of mountain ranges. The only way, therefore, is to dismiss generalities, cease to look for a climate, and find, if we can, by what process the combinations and varieties are made; for when we get hold of the manner and going on of causes, all the varieties are easily reducible.

"To make this matter intelligible, conceive that Middle California, the region of which we now speak, lying between the head waters of the two great rivers, and about four hundred and fifty or five hundred miles long from north to south, is divided lengthwise, parallel to the coast, into three strips, or ribands of about equal width. First, the coast-wise region, comprising two, three, and sometimes four

parallel tiers of mountains from five hundred to four thousand, five thousand, or even ten thousand feet high. Next, advancing inward, we have a middle strip, from fifty to seventy miles wide, of almost dead plain, which is called the great valley; down the scarcely perceptible slopes of which, from north to south, and south to north, run the two great rivers, the Sacramento and the San Joaquim, to join their waters at the middle of the basin and pass off to the sea. The third long strip, or riband, is the slope of the Sierra Nevada chain, which bounds the great valley on the east, and contains in its foot-hills, or rather in its lower half, all the gold mines. The upper half is, to a great extent, bare granite rock, and is crowned at the summit, with snow, about eight months of the year.

"Now the climate of these parallel strips will be different almost of course, and subordinate, local differences, quite as remarkable, will result from subordinate features in the local configurations, particularly of the seaward strip or portion. For all the varieties of climate, distinct as they become, are made by variations wrought in the rates of motion, the courses, the temperature, and the dryness of a single wind; viz., the trade wind of the summer months, which blows directly inward all the time, only with much greater power during that part of the day when the rarefaction of the great central valley comes to its aid; that is, from about ten o'clock in the morning, to the setting of the sun. Conceive such a wind, chilled by the cold waters that have come down from the Northern Pacific, perhaps from Behring's Straits, combing the tops and wheeling round through the valleys of the coastwise mountains, crossing the great valley at a much retarded rate, and growing hot and dry, fanning gently the foot-hills and sides of the Sierra, still more retarded by the piling necessary to break over into Utah, and the conditions of the California climate, or climates, will be understood with general accuracy. Greater simplicity in the matter of climate is impossible, and greater variety is hardly to be imagined.

"For the whole dry season, viz., from May to November, this wind is in regular blast, day by day, only sometimes approaching a little more nearly to a tempest than at others. It never brings a drop of rain, however thick and rain-like the clouds it sometimes drives before it. The cloud element, indeed, is always in it. Sometimes it is floated above, in the manner commonly designated by the term *cloud*. Sometimes, as in the early morning, when the wind is most quiet, it may be seen as a kind of fog bank resting on the sea-wall mountains or rolling down landward through the interstices of their summits. When the wind begins to hurry and take on less composedly, the fog becomes blown fog, a kind of lead dust driven through the air, reducing it from a transparent to a semi-transparent or merely translucent state, so that if any one looks up the bay, from a point twenty or thirty miles south of San Francisco, in the afternoon, he will commonly see, directly abreast of the Golden Gate where this wind drives in with its greatest power, a pencil of the lead dust shooting upwards at an angle of thirty or forty degrees, (which is the aim of the wind preparing to leap the second chain of mountains, the other side of the bay,) and finally tapering off and vanishing, at a mid-air point eight or ten miles inland, where the increased heat of the atmosphere has taken up the moisture, and restored its complete transparency. This wind is so cold, that one who will sit upon the deck of the afternoon steamer passing up the bay, will even require his heaviest winter clothing. And so rough are the waters of the bay, landlocked and narrow as it is, that sea-sickness is a kind of regular experience, with such as are candidates for that kind of felicity.

"We return now to the middle strip of the great valley where the engine, or rather boiler power, that operates the coast wind in a great part of its velocity, is located. Here the heat, reverberated as in a forge, or oven (whence *Cali – fornia*) becomes, even in the early spring, so much raised that the ground is no longer able, by any remaining cold there is in it, to condense the clouds, and rain ceases. A little further on in the season, there is not cooling influence enough left to allow even the phenomena of cloud, and for weeks together, not a cloud will be seen, unless, by chance, the skirt of one may just appear now and then, hanging over the summit of the western mountains. The sun rises, fixing his hot stare on the world, and stares through the day. Then he returns as in an orrery, and stares through another, in exactly the same way. The thermometer will go up, not seldom, to

100° or even 110°, and judging by what we know of effects here in New England, we should suppose that life would scarcely be supportable. And yet there is much less suffering from heat in this valley than with us, for the reason probably that the nights are uniformly cool. The thermometer goes down regularly with the sun, and one or two blankets are wanted for the comfort of the night. This cooling of the night is probably determined by the fact that the cool sea wind, sweeping through the upper air of the valley, from the coast mountains on one side, over the mountains and mountain passes of the Sierra on the other, is not able to get down to the ground of the valley during the day, because of the powerfully steaming column of heat that rises from it; but as soon as the sun goes down, it drops immediately to the level of the plain, bathing it for the night with a kind of perpendicular sea breeze, that has lost for the time a great part of its lateral motion. The consequence is that no one is greatly debilitated by the heat. On the contrary, it is the general testimony, that a man can do as much of mental or bodily labor in this climate, as in any other. And it is a good confirmation of this opinion, that horses will here maintain a wonderful energy, traveling greater distances, complaining far less of heat, and sustaining their spirit a great deal better than with us. It is also to be noted that there is no special tendency to fevers in this hot region, except in what is called the *tule* bottom, a kind of giant bulrush region, along the most depressed and marshiest portions of the rivers.

"Passing now to the eastern strip or portion, the slope of the Nevada, the heat, except in those deep cañons where the reverberation makes it sometimes even insupportable, is qualified in degree, according to the altitude. A gentle west wind, warmer in the lower parts or foothills by the heat of the valley, fans it all day. At points which are higher, the wind is cooler; but here also, on the slope of the Nevada, the nights are always cool in summer, so cool that the late and early frosts leave too short a space for the ordinary summer crop to mature, even where the altitude is not more than 3,000 or 4,000 feet. Meantime, at the top of the Sierra, where the west wind, piling up from below, breaks over into Utah, travelers undertake to say that in some of the passes it blows with such stress as even to polish the rocks, by the gravel and sand which it drives before it. The day is cloudless on the slope of the Sierra, as in the valley; but on the top there is now and then, or once in a year or two, a moderate thunder shower. With this exception, as referring to a part uninhabitable, thunder is scarcely ever heard in California. The principal thunders of California are underground.

"We return now to the coast-wise mountain region, where the multiplicity and confusion of climates is most remarkable. Their variety we shall find depends on the courses of the wind currents, turned hither and thither by the mountains; partly also on the side any given place occupies of its valley or mountain; and partly on the proximity of the sea. Sprinkled in among these mountains, and more or less inclosed by them, are valleys, large and small, of the highest beauty. But a valley in California means something more than a scoop, or depression. It means a rich land-lake, leveled between the mountains, with a sharply defined, picturesque shore, where it meets the sides and runs into the indentations of the mountains. What is called the Bay of San Francisco, is a large salt water lake in the middle of a much larger land-lake, sometimes called the San Jose valley. It extends south of the city forty miles, and northward among islands and mountains, about twenty-five more, if we include what is called San Pueblo Bay. Three beautiful valleys of agricultural country, the Petaluma, Sonora, and Napa valleys, open into this larger valley of the bay, on the north end of it, between four mountain barriers, having each a short navigable creek or inlet. Still farther north is the Russian River valley, opening towards the sea, and the Clear Lake valley and region, which is the Switzerland of California. East of the San Jose valley, too, at the foot of Diabola, and up among the mountains, are the large Amador and San Ramon valleys, also the little gem of the Suñole. Now these valleys, which, if we except the great valley of the two rivers, comprise the plow-land of Middle California, have each a climate of its own, and productions that correspond. We have only to observe further, that the east side of any valley will commonly be much warmer than the west; for the very paradoxical reason that the cold coast-wind always blows much harder on the side or steep slope even, of a mountain,

opposite or away from the wind, than it does on the side towards it, reversing all our notions of the sheltering effects of mountain ridges."

CHAPTER VII

During this brief tarry at Los Angelos, Carson had not been idle, but entirely without thought that his confidence could be deemed presumption, arranging his dress with as much care as its character permitted, early in the morning he mounted his horse – always in excellent trim – and rode to the residence of the man he had been informed owned the best *ranche* in the vicinity, and dismounting at the wicket gate, entered the yard, which was fenced with a finely arranged growth of club cactus; and passing up the gravel walk several rods, between an avenue of fig trees, with an occasional patch of green shrubs, and a few flowers, he stood at the door of the spacious old Spanish mansion, which was built of *adobe* one story in height and nearly a hundred feet in length, its roof covered with asphaltum mingled with sand – like all the houses in Los Angelos, a spring of this material existing a little way from the town. After waiting a few moments for an answer to his summons, made with the huge brass knocker, an Indian servant made his appearance, and ushered him to an elegantly furnished room, with several guitars lying about as if recently in use. The lordly owner of the ranche soon appeared in morning gown and slippers, the picture of a well to do old time gentleman, with an air evincing an acquaintance with the world of letters and of art, such as only travel can produce.

He asked the name of his stranger guest, as Carson approaching addressed him, and at once commenced a conversation in English, saying with a look of satisfied pleasure, "I address you in your native tongue, which I presume is agreeable, though you speak very good Spanish;" to which Carson, much more surprised to hear his native language so fluently spoken, than his host was to be addressed in Spanish, replied,

"It is certainly agreeable to find you can give me the information which, as an American, I seek, in the language my mother taught me," and at once they were on terms of easy familiarity.

As it was early morning, his host asked Carson to take a cup of coffee with him, and conducting him to the breakfast room, presented him to the family – a wife and several grown sons and daughters.

Carson enjoyed the social part of this treat, more than the tempting viands with which the board was loaded. Though Spanish was the language most used by the family, all spoke English, and a young man from Massachusetts was with them as a tutor to some of the younger children. Breakfast over, the host invited him to visit the vineyard, which he said was hardly in condition to be exhibited, as the picking had commenced two weeks before. He said his yard, of a thousand varas, yielded him more grapes than he could manage to dispose of, though last year he had made several butts of wine, and dried five thousand pounds of raisins. The vines were in the form of little trees, so closely had they been trimmed, and were still loaded with the purple clusters. Tasting them, Carson justly remarked that he had never eaten so good a grape.

"No," said his host, "I think not; neither have I, though I have traveled through Europe. The valley of the Rhine, nor of the Tagus, produces anywhere a grape like ours. I think that the Los Angelos grape is fit food indeed for angels – is quite equal to the grapes of Eshcol – you remember the heavy clusters that were found there, so that two men carried one between them on a pole resting upon their shoulders. See that now," and he drew Carson to a vine whose trunk was six inches through, and yet it needed a prop to sustain the weight of the two clusters of grapes it bore.

A species of the cactus, called the prickly pear, enclosed the vineyard, and this really bore pears, or a fruit of light orange color, in the form of a pear, but covered with a down of prickles. The Indian boy brought a towel, and wiping the fruit until it shone, gave to Carson to taste. It was sweetish, juicy, and rich, but with less of flavor than a pear. Beyond the vineyard were groves of fig and orange trees. The figs were hardly ripe, being the third crop of the season, while the oranges were nearly fit for picking. The host said that his oranges were better than usual this season, but he did not know what he should do with them. He was in the habit of shipping them to Santa Barbara and

Monterey, and thence taking some to San Jose; but latterly oranges had been brought to Monterey from the Sandwich islands by ships in the service of the Hudson Bay Company, returning from the China trade to the mouth of the Columbia, which, arriving before his were ripe, he found the fruit market forestalled.

"This is the finest country the sun shines upon," said he, "and we can live luxuriously upon just what will grow on our own farms; but we cannot get rich. Our cattle will only bring the value of the hides; our horses are of little value, for there are plenty running wild which good huntsmen can take with the lasso; and, as for fruit, from which I had hoped to realize something, the market is cut off by Yankee competition. I think we shall have the Americans with us before many years, and for my part I hope we shall. The idea of Californians generally, as well as of other Mexicans, that they are too shrewd for them, is true enough; but certainly there is plenty of room for a large population, and I should prefer that the race that has most enterprise, should come and cultivate the country with us."

Carson's youth commanded him to listen, rather than to advance his own sentiments; but he expressed his pleasure at hearing his host compliment the Americans, and said in reply, "I have not been an extensive traveler, and have chosen the life of a mountaineer, for a time certainly; but since I came to California, I am half inclined to decide to make this my home when I get tired of trapping. I like the hunt, and have found game exceedingly plenty here, but there is no buffalo, and I want that. Give me buffalo, and I would settle in California."

He described to his host a buffalo hunt in which he engaged with the Sioux Indians, before he left his father's home, at fifteen years of age, and another later, since he came into the mountains. He had hunted buffalo every year since he was twelve years old.

The Don was charmed with the earnestness and the frankness, and manifest integrity of the youth, and turning his glance upon him, with the slightly quizzical expression the face a Spaniard so readily assumes, he inquired how many buffalo he had ever killed.

"Not so many as I have deer, because I was always in a deer country; but in the eight years since I commenced going in the buffalo ranges, I must have killed five hundred. The hunter does not kill without he wishes to use. I was often permitted to take a shot at the animals before I was able to help in dressing them."

But Carson felt it might seem like boasting, for him to tell his own exploits, and changing the theme, remarked,

"Your horses would make excellent buffalo hunters, with the proper training, and I have some at camp that I intend shall see buffalo. But why do you not deal gently with them when they are first caught, and keep the fire they have in the herd? Pardon me, but I think in taming your horses, you break their spirits."

"My tutor has said the same, and I too have thought so in regard to the Mexican style of training our horses. We mount one just caught from the drove, and ride him till he becomes gentle from exhaustion. The French do not train horses in that way, nor the English; I have not been in the United States. Our custom is brought from Spain; and it answers well enough with us, where our horses go in droves, and when one is used up, we turn him out and take up another; but when we take this animal again, he is just as wild as at the first; we cannot afford to spend time on breaking him when it must be done over again directly."

And so the two hours, which Carson had allotted for his visit, passed in easy chat, and when he took his leave, his host expressed his thanks for his visit, and promised to return it at the camp.

Carson did not again see his courteous host, for early on the following morning, Mr. Young found it necessary that he should get his men away from Los Angelos as speedily as possible. They had been indulging to excess in bad liquors, and having none of the best feelings towards the Mexicans, many quarrels, some ending in bloodshed, had ensued.

He therefore despatched Carson ahead with a few men, promising to follow and overtake him at the earliest moment, and waiting another day, he managed to get his followers in a tolerably sober

condition, and succeeded, though not without much trouble, in getting away without the loss of a man, though the Mexicans were desperately enraged at the death of one of their townsmen, who had been killed in a chance fray. In three days he overtook Carson, and the party, once more reunited, advanced rapidly towards the Colorado River, his men working with a heartiness and cheerfulness, resulting from a consciousness of their misconduct at Los Angelos, which, but for the prudent discretion of Young and Carson, might have resulted disastrously to all concerned.

In nine days they were ready to commence trapping on the Colorado, and in a short time added here to the large stock of furs they had brought from California.

Here while left in charge of the camp, with only a few men, Carson found himself suddenly confronted by several hundred Indians. They entered the camp with the utmost assurance, and acted as though they felt the power of their numbers. Carson at once suspected that all was not right, and attempting to talk with them, he soon discovered that, with all their *sang froid*, each of them carried his weapons concealed beneath his garments, and immediately ordered them out of camp. Seeing the small number of the white men, the Indians were not inclined to obey, but chose to wait their time and do as they pleased, as they were accustomed to do with the Mexicans. They soon learned that they were dealing with men of different mettle, for Carson was a man not to be trifled with.

His men stood around him, each with his rifle resting in the hollow of the arm, ready to be dropped to deadly aim on the sign from their young commander. Carson addressed the old chief in Spanish, (for he had betrayed his knowledge of that language,) and warned him that though they were few, they were determined to sell their lives dearly. The Indians awed, it would seem, by the bold and defiant language of Carson, and finding that any plunder they might acquire, would be purchased at a heavy sacrifice, sullenly withdrew, and left the party to pursue their journey unmolested.

Any appearance of fear would have cost the lives of Carson and probably of the whole party, but the Indian warriors were too chary of their lives to rush into death's door unprovoked, even for the sake of the rich plunder they might hope to secure. Carson's cool bravery saved the trappers and all their effects; and this first command in an Indian engagement is but a picture of his conduct in a hundred others, when the battles were with weapons other than the tongue. The intention of the Indians had been to drive away the animals, first causing a stampede, when they would become lawful plunder, but they dared not undertake it.

The wily craftiness of the Indians induced the necessity for constant vigilance against them, and in the school this youth had been in all his life, he had shown himself an apt scholar.

CHAPTER VIII

While on the Colorado, Young's party discovered a company of Indians, (with whom they had had a previous skirmish,) as they were coming out from Los Angelos, and charging suddenly among them, succeeded in taking a large herd of cattle from them in the Indians' own style. The same week an Indian party came past their camp in the night, with a drove of a hundred horses, evidently just stolen from a Mexican town in Sonora. The trappers, with their guns for their pillows, were ready in an instant for the onslaught, and captured these horses also, the Indians hurrying away for fear of the deadly rifle. The next day they selected such as they wanted from the herd, choosing of course the finest, and turning the rest loose, to be taken again by the Indians, or to become the wild mustangs that roamed the plains of Northern Mexico, in droves of tens of thousands, and which could be captured and tamed only by the use of the lasso.

Mr. Young and his party trapped down the Colorado and up the Gila with success, then crossed to the vicinity of the New Mexican copper mines, where they left their furs and went to Santa Fe. Having procured there license to trade with the Indians about the copper mines, they returned thither for their furs, went back to Santa Fe and disposed of them to great advantage. The party disbanded with several hundred dollars apiece, which most of them expended as sailors do their earnings when they come into port. Of course Carson was hail fellow well met with them for a time. He had not hitherto taken the lesson that all have to learn, viz., that the ways of pleasure are deceitful paths; and to resist temptation needs a large amount of courage – larger perhaps than to encounter any physical danger; at least the moral courage it requires is of a higher tone than the physical courage which would carry one through a fight with a grizzly bear triumphantly; that the latter assists the former; indeed that the highest moral courage must be aided by physical bravery, but that the latter may exist entirely independently of the former.

Carson learned during this season of hilarity the necessity of saying No! and he did so persistently, knowing that if he failed in this he would be lost to himself and to everything dear in life. He was now twenty-one, and though the terrible ordeal of poverty had been nobly borne, and he had conquered, the latter ordeal of temptation from the sudden possession of what was to him a large sum of money, had proved for once, too much. And it is well for him perhaps it was so; as it enabled him to sow his wild oats in early youth.

It is not improbable that some of this party belonged to the class of Canadians called *coureurs des bois*, whose habits Mr. Irving thus describes in his Astoria:

"A new and anomalous class of men gradually grew out of this trade. These were called *coureurs des bois*, rangers of the woods; originally men who had accompanied the Indians in their hunting expeditions, and made themselves acquainted with remote tracts and tribes; and who now became, as it were, pedlers of the wilderness. These men would set out from Montreal with canoes well stocked with goods, with arms and ammunition, and would make their way up the mazy and wandering rivers that interlace the vast forests of the Canadas, coasting the most remote lakes, and creating new wants and habitudes among the natives. Sometimes they sojourned for months among them, assimilating to their tastes and habits with the happy facility of Frenchmen; adopting in some degree the Indian dress, and not unfrequently taking to themselves Indian wives.

"Twelve, fifteen, eighteen months would often elapse without any tidings of them, when they would come sweeping their way down the Ottawa in full glee, their canoes laden down with packs of beaver skins. Now came their turn for revelry and extravagance. 'You would be amazed,' says an old writer already quoted, 'if you saw how lewd these pedlers are when they return; how they feast and game, and how prodigal they are, not only in their clothes, but upon their sweethearts. Such of them as are married have the wisdom to retire to their own houses; but the bachelors do just as an East Indiaman and pirates are wont to do; for they lavish, eat, drink, and play all away as long as the goods

hold out; and when these are gone, they even sell their embroidery, their lace, and their clothes. This done, they are forced upon a new voyage for subsistence.'"

Many of these *coureurs des bois* became so accustomed to the Indian mode of living, and the perfect freedom of the wilderness, that they lost all relish for civilization, and identified themselves with the savages among whom they dwelt, or could only be distinguished from them by superior licentiousness.

In the autumn Carson joined another trapping party under Mr. Fitzpatrick, whom we shall have frequent occasion to mention hereafter. They proceeded up the Platte and Sweet Water past Goose Creek to the Salmon River, where they wintered, like other parties, sharing the good will of the Nez Perces Indians, and having the vexations of the Blackfeet for a constant fear. Mr. Fitzpatrick, less daring than Carson, declined sending him to punish this tribe for their depredations.

In the spring they came to Bear river, which flows from the north to Salt Lake. Carson and four men left Mr. Fitzpatrick here, and went ten days to find Captain Gaunt in the place called the New Park, on the head waters of the Arkansas, where they spent the trapping season, and wintered. While the party were wintering in camp, being robbed of some of their horses by a band of sixty Crow Indians, Carson, as usual, was appointed to lead the party sent in pursuit of the plunderers. With only twelve men he took up the trail, came upon the Indians in one of their strongholds, cut loose the animals, which were tied within ten feet of the fort of logs in which the enemy had taken shelter, attacked them, killed five of their warriors, and made good his retreat with the recovered horses; an Indian of another tribe who was with the trappers bringing away a Crow scalp as a trophy.[3]

In the spring, while trapping on the Platte River, two men belonging to the party deserted and robbed a *cache*, or underground deposit of furs, which had been made by Captain Gaunt, in the neighborhood. Carson, with only one companion, went off in pursuit of the thieves, who, however, were never heard of afterwards.

Not finding the plunderers, Carson and his companion remained at the old camp on the Arkansas, where the *cache* had been made, until they were relieved by a party sent out from the United States with supplies for Captain Gaunt's trappers. They were soon after joined by a party of Gaunt's men, and started to his camp. On their way they had repeated encounters with Indians attempting to steal their horses, but easily beat them off and saved their property.

On one occasion when Carson and the other trappers were out in search of *beaver sign*, they came suddenly upon a band of sixty warriors well armed and mounted. In the presence of such a force their only safety was in flight. Amid a shower of bullets from the Indian rifles, they made good their escape. Carson considered this one of his narrowest escapes.

[3] Cutts. Conquest of California and New Mexico.

CHAPTER IX

In the spring of 1832, Mr. Gaunt's party had been unsuccessful, and were now upon a stream where there was no beaver, therefore Carson announced his intention of hunting on his own account. Two of his companions joined him, and the three for the whole season pursued their work successfully, high up in the mountain streams, while the Indians were down in the plains hunting buffalo; and taking their fur to Taos, disposed of them at a remunerative price. While the two former spent their money in the usual way, Carson saved his hard earnings which his companions were so recklessly throwing away. This self-discipline, and schooling himself to virtue and temperance, was not without effort on the part of Kit Carson, for he loved the good will and kindly civilities of his companions; but he knew also that he could not have his cake and eat it too, and chose to save his money and his strength for future use.

While remaining at Taos, Captain Lee, formerly of the United States army, now a partner of Bent and St. Vrain, at Bent's Fort, invited Carson to join an expedition which he was arranging. Carson accepted his offer, starting in October. Going northward they came up with a party of twenty traders and trappers, upon a branch of the Green River, and all entered winter quarters here together.

Mr. Robideau had in his employ a Californian Indian, very skillful in the chase – whether for game or for human prey – very courageous, and able to endure the greatest hardships, and whose conduct hitherto had won the confidence of all. This Indian had left clandestinely, taking with him six of Mr. Robideau's most valuable horses, which were worth at least twelve hundred dollars. Mr. Robideau, determined to recover them if possible, solicited Carson to pursue and overtake the Indian. Kit asked his employer, Mr. Lees', permission to serve Mr. Robideau, which was readily granted, when he at once prepared himself for hard riding and sturdy resistance.

From a Utah village near he obtained an intelligent and brave young warrior to join him – for Carson's reputation for courage, skill, and efficiency, were known to the tribes, and many of its braves were attached to him, and afterwards proved that they cherished a lasting friendship for him.

For a time the blindness of the trail compelled them to go slowly, but once sure of its direction, they pursued it with the utmost speed, down Green river, Carson concluding the Indian was directing his course toward California. When they had gone a hundred miles on their way, the Indian's horse was suddenly taken sick. The Indian would not consent to continue the pursuit, as Carson suggested, on foot, and he therefore determined to go on alone, and putting spurs to his horse revolved not to return until he had succeeded in recovering Mr. Robideau's property. With practiced eye ever upon the trail, he revolved in his mind the expert skill he might need to exercise in encountering the wily savage. This desperate expedition Carson had boldly entered into, not with rashness, but he had accepted it as an occasion that demanded the hazard. At the distance of thirty miles from where he left his Utah companion, he discovered the object of his chase. The Indian too had discovered him, and to prepare himself for the attack, turned to seek a shelter whence he might fire and reload without exposure to the shot from Carson's rifle – which he had unslung when first he discovered the Indian.

With his horse at full speed, at the moment the Indian reached his cover, Carson fired with aim so true that the Indian gave one bound and fell dead beside his horse, while his gun went off at the same instant. No further particulars of description or speculation can add to the interest of this picture. We leave it to the imagination of the reader, as an illustration of the daring and fidelity of Kit Carson. Collecting the horses, he soon had the pleasure, after a few minor difficulties, of presenting to Mr. Robideau, the six animals he had lost, in as good condition as when they were stolen, and of announcing to him the fact that there lived one less rogue.

Soon after Carson's return to camp, some trappers brought them news that Messrs. Fitzpatrick and Bridger were camped fifteen miles from them. Captain Lee and Carson at once concluded that to them they might sell their goods. They started for their camp and were as successful as they had hoped,

for they sold their whole stock of goods to this party, and took their pay in furs. Their contract being now completed, Carson joined Mr. Fitzpatrick again in a trapping expedition, but did not remain long with him, because the party was too large to make it pay, or even to work harmoniously together. With three men whom he chose from the many who wished to join him, Carson again commenced trapping on his own account. They trapped all summer on the Laramie, with unusual success. It was while Carson was out on this tramp that he had the adventure with the grizzly bears,* which he considered the most perilous that he ever passed through. He had gone out from the camp on foot to shoot game for supper, and had just brought down an elk, when two grizzly bears came suddenly upon him. His rifle being empty, there was no way of escape from instant death but to run with his utmost speed for the nearest tree. He reached a sapling with the bears just at his heels. Cutting off a limb of the tree with his knife, he used that as his only weapon of defence. When the bears climbed so as nearly to reach him, he gave them smart raps on the nose, which sent them away growling; but when the pain ceased they would return again only to have the raps repeated. In this way nearly the whole night was spent, when finally the bears became discouraged, and retired from the contest. Waiting until they were well out of sight, Carson descended from his unenviable position, and made the best of his way into camp, which he reached about daylight. The elk had been devoured by wolves before it could be found, and his three companions were only too glad to see him, to be troubled about breakfasting on beaver, as they had supped the night before; for trappers in camp engaged in their business had this resort for food when all others failed.

Laramie river flows into the North Platte, upon the south side. The country through which it flows is open, yet the stream is bordered with a variety of shrubbery, and in many spots the cottonwood grows luxuriantly, and for this reason, the locality is favorable for the grizzly bear.

Baird says of this bear: "While the black bear is the bear of the forest, the grizzly is the bear of the chapparal, the latter choosing an open country, whether plain or mountain, whose surface is covered with dense thickets of manzanita or shrub oak, which furnish him with his favorite food, and clumps of service bushes, and low cherry; and whose streams are lined with tangled thickets of low grape vine and wild plumb." The grizzly is not so good at climbing as the black bear, and can best manage by resting upon his haunches and mounting with his fore arms upon the bushes that he cannot pull over, to gather the berries, of which he is very fond.

"Only in a condition of hunger will he attack a man unprovoked, but when he does, the energy with which he fights, prevents the Indians from seeking the sport of a hunt for the grizzly bear. He is monarch of the plain, with only their opposition, and has departed only before the rifle of the white hunter. An Indian, who would, alone, undertake to conquer a dozen braves of another tribe, would shrink from attacking a grizzly bear; and to have killed one, furnishes a story for a life time, and gives a reputation that descends to posterity. The mounted hunter can rarely bring his horse to approach him near enough for a shot."

Soon after his encounter with the bears, Carson and his men were rejoiced by the arrival of Capt. Bridger, so long a mountaineer of note, and with him his whole band. Carson and his three companions joined with them, and were safe; and now for the first time he attended the summer rendezvous of trappers on the Green River, where they assembled for the disposal of their furs, and the purchase of such outfit as they needed.

Carson for the Fall hunt joined a company of fifty, and went to the country of the Blackfeet, at the head waters of the Missouri; but the Indians were so numerous, and so determined upon hostility, that a white man could not leave his camp without danger of being shot down; therefore, quitting the Blackfeet country, they camped on the Big Snake River for winter quarters.

During the winter months, the Blackfeet had in the night run off eighteen of their horses, and Kit Carson, with eleven men, was sent to recover them, and chastise their temerity. They rode fifty

* Peters.

miles through the snow before coming up with the Indians, and instantly made an attempt to recover their animals, which were loose and quietly grazing.

The Indians, wearing snow shoes, had the advantage, and Carson readily granted the parley they asked. One man from each party advanced, and between the contending ranks had a talk. The Indians informed them that they supposed they had been robbing the Snake Indians, and did not desire to steal from white men. Of course this tale was false, and Carson asked why they did not lay down their arms and ask for a smoke, but to this they had no reply to make. However, both parties laid aside their weapons and prepared for the smoke; and the lighted calumet was puffed by every one of the savages and the whites alternately, and the head men of the savages made several long non-committal speeches, to which, in reply, the trappers came directly to the point, and said they would hear nothing of conciliation from them until their property was returned.

After much talk, the Indians brought in five of the poorest horses. The whites at once started for their guns, which the Indians did at the same time, and the fight at once commenced. Carson and a comrade named Markland having seized their rifles first, were at the lead, and selected for their mark two Indians who were near each other and behind different trees; but as Kit was about to fire, he perceived Markland's antagonist aiming at him with death-like precision, while Markland had not noticed him, and on the instant, neglecting his own adversary, he sent a bullet through the heart of the other savage, but at the moment saw that his own enemy's rifle was aimed at his breast. He was not quite quick enough to dodge the ball, and it struck the side of his neck, and passed through his shoulder, shattering the bone.

Carson was thenceforward only a spectator of the fight, which continued until night, when both parties retired from the field of battle and went into camp.

Carson's wound was very painful, and bled freely, till the cold checked the flow of blood. They dared not light a fire, and in the cold and darkness, Carson uttered not a word of complaint, nor did even a groan escape him. His companions were earnest in their sympathy, but he was too brave to need it, or to allow his wound to influence the course they should pursue. In a council of war which they held, it was decided that, as they had slain several Indians, and had themselves only one wounded, they had best return to camp, as they were in unfit condition to continue the pursuit. Arriving at camp, another council was held, at which it was decided to send thirty men under Capt. Bridger, to pursue and chastise these Blackfeet thieves. This party followed the Indian trail several days, but finally returned, concluding it was useless to search further, as they had failed to overtake them.

CHAPTER X

The Spring hunt opened on the Green river, and continuing there a while, the party went to the Big Snake; and after trapping with extraordinary success for a few weeks, returned to the Summer rendezvous, held again upon the Green River. Meantime Carson had recovered from his wound.

An unusually large number of trappers and traders, with great numbers from the neighboring Indian tribes, assembled at this rendezvous, made up of Canadians, Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Spaniards, and many a backwoodsman, who had lived upon the borders, perhaps, for three generations, removing when a neighbor came within ten miles, because *near* neighbors were a nuisance to him. Let us see the parties as they come in, the leader, or the one to whom fitness accords this position, having selected the spot for the camp, so remote from every other, as to have plenty of grass about it for the animals of the party. Perhaps a tent is spread, at least, everything is put in proper order, according to the notions and the tastes of the men who make up the party; for the camp is the home of its members, and here they will receive visitors, and exchange courtesies.

The party or parties that have made the special arrangements for the rendezvous – traders with a full supply of goods – have spread a large tent in a central spot of the general encampment, where the whole company, save those detained at each camp in charge of the animals belonging to it, will assemble, at certain hours each day, the time upon which the sales are announced to take place, and the exchanges commence.

The several parties arriving first, have been obliged to wait until all expected for the season have arrived, because there is a feeling of honor as well as a care for competition, that compels the custom. The traders take furs or money for their goods, which bring prices that seem fabulous to those unaccustomed to the sight or stories of mountain life. The charge, of course, is made upon the ground of the expense and risk of bringing goods eight hundred and a thousand miles into the wilderness, from the nearest points in western Missouri and St. Louis.

Irving opens his Astoria with the following: "Two leading objects of commercial gain, have given birth to wide daring and enterprise in the early history of the Americas; the precious metals of the South and the rich peltries of the North." When he wrote this, it was true of the localities he named – the gold was not yet an attraction, except in the south, and only the British Fur Company in Canada had become an object of history in this branch of trade. He says, "While the fiery and magnificent Spaniard, influenced with the mania for gold, has extended his discoveries and conquests over those brilliant countries, scorched by the ardent sun of the tropics, the adroit Frenchman, and the cool and calculating Briton, have pursued the less splendid, but no less lucrative, traffic in furs, amidst the hyper-borean regions of the Canadas, until they advanced even within the Artic Circle.

"These two pursuits have thus, in a manner, been the pioneers and precursors of civilization. Without pausing on the borders, they have penetrated at once, in defiance of difficulties and dangers, to the heart of savage countries; laying open the hidden secrets of the wilderness; leading the way to remote regions of beauty and fertility, that might have remained unexplored for ages, and beckoning after them the slow and pausing steps of agriculture and civilization. It was the fur trade, in fact, that gave early sustenance and vitality to the great Canadian provinces.

"Being destitute of the precious metals, they were for a long time neglected by the parent country. The French adventurers, however, who had settled on the banks of the St. Lawrence, soon found that in the rich peltries of the interior, they had sources of wealth that might almost rival the mines of Mexico and Peru." The Indians, as yet unacquainted with the artificial value given to some descriptions of furs, in civilized life, brought quantities of the most precious kinds and bartered them away for European trinkets and cheap commodities. Immense profits were thus made by the early traders, and the traffic was pursued with avidity.

"As the valuable furs became scarce in the neighborhood of the settlements, the Indians of the vicinity were stimulated to take a wider range in their hunting expeditions; they were generally accompanied on these expeditions by some of the traders or their dependants, who shared in the toils and perils of the chase, and at the same time, made themselves acquainted with the best hunting grounds, and with the remote tribes whom they encouraged to bring peltries to the settlements. In this way the trade augmented, and was drawn from remote quarters to Montreal. Every now and then a large body of Ottawas, Hurons, and other tribes who hunted the countries bordering on the great lakes, would come down in a squadron of light canoes, laden with beaver skins and other spoils of the year's hunting. The canoes would be unladen, taken on shore, and their contents disposed in order. A camp of birch-bark would be pitched outside of the town, and a kind of primitive fair opened with that grave ceremonial so dear to the Indians.

"Now would ensue a brisk traffic with the merchants, and all Montreal would be alive with naked Indians, running from shop to shop, bargaining for arms, kettles, knives, axes, blankets, bright-colored cloths, and other articles of use or fancy; upon all which, the merchants were sure to clear two hundred per cent.

"Their wants and caprices being supplied, they would take leave, strike their tents, launch their canoes, and ply their way up the Ottawa to the lakes."

Later, the French traders, *couriers des bois*, penetrated the remote forests, carrying such goods as the Indians required, and held rendezvous among them, on a smaller scale, but similar to the one Carson had attended, so far as the Indian trade was concerned. But the Yankee element of character preponderated among the traders and trappers from the States; besides the greater difficulty and expense necessarily incurred to reach the hunting grounds by land than in canoe, called into the work only men of energy and higher skill than the employees, mostly French, in the service of the Hudson Bay Fur Company, and a score of smaller parties, each owning no authority outside itself, adopted the plan of these summer encampments, during the season when the fur of the beaver and the otter was not good, as an arrangement for mutual convenience; and the Indians of this more southern section availed themselves of the occasion, for their own pleasure and profit, and to the advantage and satisfaction of the traders, whose prices ruled high in proportion to the difficulty of transit, as well as the monopoly in their hands of the articles deemed necessary to the trapper's dress, culinary establishment, and outfit. These consisted of a woolen shirt, a sash or belt, and with some stockings, coffee, and black pepper, and salt, unless he could supply himself from the licks the buffalo visits; with tin kettle, and cup, and frying pan; the accoutrements of the horse, saddle and packsaddle, bridle, spurs, and horse-shoes; with material for bait; and last, but not least, tobacco, which if he did not use, he carried to give to the Indians – made up not only the necessaries, but the luxuries which the Indian and the white man indulged in, and for which, at such times, they paid their money or their furs.

Perhaps the trapper took an Indian wife, and then she must be made fine with dress, denoting the dignity of her position as wife of a white man, and presents must be given to the friends of his bride. This was usually an expensive luxury, but indulged in most frequently by the French and Canadian trappers, many of whom are now living quietly upon their farms in Oregon and California, and the numerous valleys of the West. Indeed we might give the names of many a mountain ranger, and pioneer of note, first a trapper, who still lives surrounded by his Indian wife and their children, and finds himself thus connected with this people, having their utmost confidence, chosen the chief of his tribe, and able to care for them as no one not in such association could.

At almost any point upon Green River the grass upon the bottom lands is sufficient for a night's encampment for a small party; but at the place selected for the rendezvous, in the space of two or three miles upon either side of the river, the bottom spreads out in a broad prairie, and the luxuriant growth of grass, with the country open all about it, made the spot desirable for a large encampment.

CHAPTER XI

Early in the summer the grass is green, but later it is hay made naturally, root and branch dried on the ground – there is no sod – and this, though less agreeable, is more nutritious for the animals than fresh grass.

A scattered growth of fine old trees furnishes shade at every camp, and immediately about the great tent they afford protection from the sun to parties of card players, or a "Grocery stand," at which the principal article of sale is "whiskey by the glass;" and perhaps, further on is a *monte* table, parties from several Indian tribes, and the pioneer of semi-civilization – the back-woodsman – has come in "with his traps," a few bags of flour, and possibly some cheese and butter, and the never failing cask of whiskey. Perhaps his wagon is the grocery stand, to which we have just alluded. Without extenuation, these encampments were grand occasions of which a few descriptions may be found written at the time by men of science and intellectual culture, like Sir Wm. Stewart, who traveled upon these plains for pleasure, or the Rev. Samuel Parker, who happened at a Green River rendezvous, in 1835, while on his way to the Columbia River, under the auspices of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. This was long before Brigham Young came West – before his scheme of religious colonization had its birth.

There is now – has been for years – a trading post where a Canadian Frenchman and an American partner, with Indian wives, have provided entertainment or furnished supplies to emigrants and Indians. It is near the Green River crossing, on the road from the South Pass to great Salt Lake City, via Fort Bridger.

Amid the motley company it might be expected that quarrels would arise, and disorderly conduct, growing out of the feuds among the tribes of Indians. These were kept in abeyance as much as possible, and already Carson's popularity with them enabled him to act the part of peace-maker between them and the quarrelsome whites, as well as between each other, for many of them recognized him as the brave who had led excursions, whose success they had felt and suffered, and even though leader of victorious parties against themselves, they admired his prowess still; for the party of Blackfeet came to the rendezvous under the protection of the white flag, and for the time, no one more truly buried the hatchet than Carson, though just recovered from a wound given by a party of that tribe, which had nearly cost him his life, and of which we have written in a previous chapter.

There was belonging to one of the trapping parties a Frenchman by the name of Shuman, known at the rendezvous as "the big bully of the mountains," exceedingly annoying on account of his boasts and taunts, a constant exciter of tumult and disorder, especially among the Indians. Bad enough at any time, with the means now for intoxication, he was even more dangerous.

The habits of the mountaineers, without law save such as the exigency of the moment demanded, required a firm, steady hand to rule. Carson had feared the results of this man's lawlessness, and had often desired to be rid of him, but he had not as yet found the proper opportunity. The mischiefs he committed grew worse and worse, and yet for the sake of peace they were borne unresistingly. At length an opportunity offered to try his courage. One day Shuman, boasting of his exploits, was particularly insolent and insulting toward all Americans, whom he described as only fit to be whipped with switches. Carson was in the crowd, and immediately stepped forward, saying, "I am an American, the most inconsiderable one among them, but if you wish to die, I will accept your challenge."

Shuman defied him. He was sitting upon his horse, with his loaded rifle in his hand. Carson leaped upon his horse with a loaded pistol, and both rushed into close combat. They fired, almost at the same moment, but Carson an instant before his boasting antagonist. Their horses' heads touched, Shuman's ball just grazing Carson's cheek, near the left eye, and cutting off some locks of his hair. Carson's ball entered Shuman's hand, came out at the wrist, and passed through his arm above the

elbow. The bully begged for his life, and it was spared; and from that time forward, Americans were no more insulted by him.

If, as in other duels, we were to go back to remoter causes, and find in this too, the defence of woman – a Blackfoot beauty – whom Shuman had determined to abuse, which Carson's interference only had prevented, for the sake of truth, of honor, and virtue, as against insolence, falsehood, and treachery, although the girl did belong to a tribe that was treacherous; we shall be but giving a point to the story that it needs for completeness, and show Carson in the exalted manliness and fidelity of his character.

The trappers made arrangements at the rendezvous for the fall hunt; and the party who were so fortunate as to secure Carson's services, went to the Yellowstone River, in the Blackfeet country, but met with no success. Crossing through the Crows' country to the Big Horn River, they met the party of Blackfeet returning from Green River. Carson held a parley with them, as was his custom whenever it was safe to go to an Indian camp. He told them he had seen none of their people, and that the tomahawk was buried if they were faithful to him. "But," said he, "the Crows are my friends, and while I am with them, they must be yours."

On the Big Horn, too, their success was no better, and Carson did not meet his Crow friends. On the Big Snake, too, which they next visited, the result was the same.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.