BIRGE JULIUS CHARLES

THE AWAKENING OF THE DESERT

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
A Call to the Wilderness

WILL you join us in a camping trip to the Pacific Coast?" This alluring invitation was addressed to the writer one cold, drizzly night in the early spring of 1866 by Captain Hill Whitmore, one of a party of six men who by prearrangement had gathered round a cheerful wood fire in a village store in Whitewater, Wisconsin.

The regular business of the establishment had ended for the day; the tight wooden shutters had been placed upon the doors and windows of the store as was the custom in those times; and the key was now turned in the lock to prevent intrusions. All the lights had been turned off, except that of a single kerosene lamp, suspended from the ceiling near the stove; the gentle glow revealed within a small arc on either side of the room the lines of shelving filled with bolts of dry goods, but toward the front and the rear of the long room it was lost in the darkness. The conditions were favorable for a quiet, undisturbed discussion of a proposed enterprise, for even Ray, the clerk, after ramming a

maple log into the fire, had quietly stretched himself out upon one of the long counters near the stove, resting his head upon a bolt of blue denim.

Tipping back in a big wooden chair against the opposite counter, at the Captain's side, with his feet on the rail by the stove, sat big John Wilson. John had made a trip across the plains with Whitmore the preceding year, and was now arranging to become his partner in a similar venture on a larger scale. Trader and adventurer by instinct, Wilson, as his record had shown, would promptly accept a brickyard or a grocery in exchange for live stock or a farm, and preferred any new enterprise to a business with which he was familiar.

Fred Day, an interesting young man of twenty years, was a consumptive. He and I sat side by side at the front of the stove, while nervous little Paul Beemer, when not pacing back and forth between the counters behind us, sat astride a small chair, resting his arms on its back, and listening with close attention.

Stalwart Dan Trippe sat in a big arm chair near Paul. He had already been informed in a general way that a transcontinental expedition was being planned. Dan also was ever ready to consider any new venture. He had once crossed the plains to Pike's Peak, and had no present vocation. Running his fingers through his curly hair, as was his habit in serious moments, he launched a question toward the opposite side of the stove.

"Well, John, what's the proposition? What's the scheme?"

Dropping his chair forward upon its four legs, and knocking

the ashes from his pipe, John proceeded to outline the tentative plan then in mind. Briefly stated, the project was to fit out a wagon train with the view of freighting from the Missouri River to the Coast. In the preceding year the rates for transportation to Salt Lake had been from twenty to thirty cents per pound, affording a fine profit if the train should go through safe.

Hill Whitmore, a vigorous, compactly built man, then in the prime of life, and who since the discovery of gold in California had more than once piloted such trains across the wide stretch of plains and mountains to the Pacific Coast, would be a partner in the enterprise and the Captain of the expedition. We had known him long and well.

An opportunity was now offered for the investment of more capital which, if no mishap should befall the train, would pay 'big money.'

A few young fellows could also accompany the outfit and obtain a great experience at a moderate cost. Being myself a convalescent from a serious attack of typhoid fever, and having temporarily withdrawn from business at the recommendation of physicians, Fred's condition commanded my serious consideration. I gently pulled his coat-sleeve as a signal for him to follow me, and we leisurely sauntered down into the shadows near the front of the store where, backing up against a counter, we were soon seated together on its top. We both knew, without exchanging a word, that we had some interests in common. Ordinarily, he was a genial and affable companion, but

we both remained silent then, for we were absorbed in thinking – and doubtless along the same lines. The mere suggestion of the trip at once brought vividly to my mind all the little I then knew of the West. Like all Gaul in the days of Caesar, it seemed in some vague way to be divided into three parts, the plains, the mountains, and the region beyond.

The indefiniteness of the old western maps of the day left much to the imagination of the young student of geography and suggested the idea of something new to be discovered. The great American Desert was represented as extending hundreds of miles along the eastern slope of the mountains. Other deserts were shown in the unoccupied spaces beyond, and so here and there on our maps of the western territories was inserted the name of some Indian tribe which was supposed to lead its wild, nomadic life in the district indicated. A few rivers and mountain peaks which had received the names of early explorers, Great Salt Lake to which the Mormons had been led, and other objects to which had been applied the breezy, not to say blood-curdling, appellations peculiar to the nomenclature of the West, all were perhaps more familiar to the average American schoolboy than were the classic names which have lived through twenty centuries of history. In the imagination of youth, "Smoky Hill Fork," "Devil's Slide," and "Rattlesnake Hills" figured as pretty nearly what such terms naturally suggest. Along the first-mentioned stream – then far away from civilization – the soft haze and smoke of an ideal Indian summer was supposed to rest

perpetually, and it was believed that in days of long ago, weird demons were really wont to disport themselves on the mountain slope called Devil's Slide. The far West seemed to be a mystic land always and everywhere wooing to interesting adventure.

> "As geographers in Afric's maps
> With savage pictures fill their gaps,"

"Do you think that Ben would go?" asked Fred in an earnest tone.

"That's a bright thought, Fred. With Ben, we would be a harmonious triumvirate; but let's hear more of the program." So we returned to our seats by the stove.

Whitmore was outlining some of the details and indicating the provisions which it would be necessary to make, in view of the fact that no railroad had as yet been laid even across Iowa, much less between the Missouri and the Pacific.

"Now boys, you must understand that we're cutting loose from all established settlements. There won't be any stores to drop into to buy anything that you have forgotten to bring along. Anybody that wants lemonade will have to bring along his lemons and his squeezer. After we get beyond the Missouri River you will find no white peoples' homes until you strike the Mormon settlement in Utah, so we'll have to take along enough grub to feed us for several months; – of course we ought to kill some game on the way, which will help out. Our stock must live wholly upon such

pasturage as can be found along the way. The men must also be well armed with rifles; wagons must be built; and the cattle must be purchased. There is a lot to do to get ready, and we must start in on it at once."

During the preceding year, as was well known, the Indians in the West had been unusually hostile. Many parties of freighters, among them Whitmore's train, had been attacked, and a great number of travelers had been massacred. That year and the one to be described, are still mentioned in the annals of the West, as "the bloody years on the plains." This state of affairs was fully considered and discussed, not solely from the standpoint of personal safety, but also with reference to the success of the enterprise.

Having been reared among the Indian tribes of Southern Wisconsin, and within a mile of the spot where Abraham Lincoln disbanded his company at the close of the Black Hawk War, I was disposed to believe that I was not entirely unfamiliar with the manners and customs of the aborigines. Searches for arrows and spearheads in prehistoric Aztalan and in other places, visits to Bad Axe and to other scenes of conflict with Indians had been to me sources of keen delight. Over these battlefields there seemed to rest a halo of glory. They were invested with interest profound as that which, in later years, stimulated my imagination when I looked upon more notable battlefields of the Old World, where the destinies of nations had been decided. But at this time the experiences of my youth were fresh in my mind and the

suggestion of a western trip found in me an eager welcome.

It was not indeed the lure of wealth, nor entirely a search for health that attracted the younger members of the party to a consideration of the project, nor in contemplating such an expedition was there enkindled any burning desire for warfare; it was the fascination of the wild life in prospect that tempted us most powerfully to share the fortunes of the other boys who had been our companions in earlier years and whom we fervently hoped would join the party. Fred undoubtedly expressed our sentiments when he said:

"My enthusiasm might take a big slump if a raid of those red devils should swoop down upon us, but if I go, I shall feel as if I didn't get my money's worth, if we don't see some of the real life of the Wild West."

We had all been accustomed to the use of firearms and could picture in our imagination how, from behind an ample rock, with the aid of good long-range rifles, we would valiantly defend ourselves against an enemy armed with bows and arrows, we being far beyond the range of such primitive weapons.

Immense herds of buffalo and other large game were also known to range over the plains from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico, and these at times might receive proper attention. Yea, there were some present who even expressed a desire to capture a grizzly bear in the mountains – of course under sane and safe conditions – though none up to that time had seen the real thing.

A former schoolmate, Billy Comstock, best known as "Wild Bill," who rode the first pony express from Atchison, and had often been called upon by our Government to act as Indian interpreter, was said to be somewhere on the plains. This was encouraging, for William would be able to give us some interesting pointers.

"We will meet here again after the store closes tomorrow night" was the word that passed round as we went out into the sleet and rain, and the door closed behind us.

At the earliest opportunity our friend, Ben Frees, who had recently returned from the war, was interviewed with favorable results.

"Yes, I will go with the boys," was my decision finally reached after a full discussion of the subject at home.

And the three boys went.

CHAPTER II
"Roll Out"

WHITMORE and Wilson, who were the leading spirits in our expedition, urged that twenty-five Henry repeating rifles (which had recently been invented) and thirty Colt's revolvers should be secured for our party; this in view of their experience on the plains in the preceding year and of recent reports from the West. If any trifling precaution of that nature would in any way contribute to the safety and comfort of those gentlemen, it would certainly meet with my approval. They were to leave families behind them and should go fully protected. In fact certain stories that had been related in my hearing had excited even within my breast a strong prejudice against the impolite and boorish manner in which Indians sometimes scalped their captives. Orders were accordingly transmitted for the arms to be shipped from Hartford. The sixty wagons were built specially for the purpose in question and thirty-six vigorous young men, the most of whom had seen service in the Civil War just ended, were secured to manage the teams.

Under the new white canvas cover of each wagon lay at least one rifle. The men had practiced more or less the use of the peculiar whip that seemed necessary for the long teams. It consisted of a very short stock and an exceedingly long lash,

which the expert can throw to its utmost length so as to reach the flank of a leader with accuracy, and without injury to the beast, producing a report rivaling in sharpness the explosion of a firecracker. The loudness of its snap was the measure of the skill with which the whip had been wielded.

The afternoon of Wednesday, April 18th, beheld a lively scene on the streets of the old town. Three hundred and sixty oxen, strong and healthy, but in some instances refractory, (as might have been expected), were carefully distributed and yoked up in their assigned positions. With the wagons they were lined out in the long street, the train extending about three-fifths of a mile, while the men in position awaited the command to move. In addition to the crowds of children and other curious onlookers, there were gathered at each wagon many friends, relatives, and, in some cases, sweethearts of the young men in charge of the several teams, to speak the tender words of farewell. It may sound strange now to say that many tears were shed. In this day of safe and swift travel, it is not easy to find occasion that would justify such a demonstration. It must be remembered, however, that the trip, even to Salt Lake City, on which this train was about to set out, would consume more time than now would be necessary to circle the globe. Moreover, the war, during which partings had come to be serious occasions, had but just ended. After leaving the Missouri River by the route contemplated, communication with friends at home would be suspended or uncertain for many months. The alarming indications of trouble with Indians on the

plains were also in every mind, but were doubtless viewed less seriously by the strong young men now departing than by those who were left behind, even by such as would not be apt "to fear for the fearless were they companions in their danger."

The appointed hour of four o'clock having arrived, the command "roll out," which afterwards became very familiar, was given. Under vigorous and incessant cracking of the new whips, the long train began to move on its journey westward. Expressions of kind wishes blended with cheers and the voices of the drivers, who were as yet not familiar with the great teams which they were to manage.

The undignified conduct of some of the young, untrained oxen, which occasionally persisted in an endeavor to strike off for themselves (possibly to seek their former masters' cribs), and the efforts of inexperienced drivers to bring them under subjection, were the cause of much amusement, especially when one long team, inspired by some sudden impulse, swung round its driver and doubled up in a confused mass, while a lone but unobserved country woman in a buggy was endeavoring to drive by. His years of experience in a country store were then of little avail to the young whipmaster who was less expert in wielding a long lash than in measuring calico for maidens. While raising his voice to its highest pitch, he was also striving to demonstrate his skill in manipulating the formidable thong by landing its resounding tip on the flank of an unruly steer full fifty feet away. As the long cord whirled swiftly in its broad circuit behind him it completely

enwrapped the body of the woman. A terrific scream was the first intimation which came to our busy driver telling him the nature of the obstruction against which he was tugging. Her horse at once joined in the *mêlee*, and, starting, dragged the whip behind the buggy, until assistance was given and apologies were made. The woman pleasantly remarked that she would not feel safe on her farm with many such drivers around.

Before sunset the train reached Harrington's Pond, the objective point of the first night's camp. The cooks at once pitched their tent, while the teamsters, having corralled the wagons into a circle, prepared to turn the cattle loose to feed upon the range. Before they were released, Whitmore shouted to the driver inside the circle:

"Now boys, everybody must look at his oxen mighty careful so as to know them and know where they belong in the teams, because if you don't you'll have a tussle in the morning picking out your stock and yoking them right when they'll be mixed up with four hundred other oxen."

Hearing this admonition, Gus Scoville, who had long been a store clerk, stood beside his oxen in a state of doubt and dire perplexity and finally opened his heart:

"Say Jule, these oxen all look just alike to me. How in thunder is a fellow going to know them in the morning; it's hard enough to know some people."

"Why Gus, they have lots of expression in their faces, and know each other mighty well. Say, I'll tell you how to work it,

get a black rag and tear it into long strings and tie a strip around the tail of each ox."

I don't know from whose old coat Gus tore the black lining, but the oxen were soon decorated with emblems of mourning. The guards to watch the stock having been assigned, the men came down to the realities of camp life: no more china plates set by dainty hands on white linen tablecloths; no more delicate tidbits such as a housewife in a comfortable home so often serves; no easy chairs in which to rest in comfort, and no cleanly beds in which to pass the night, – yet no one was disappointed, and good spirits prevailed. The tin plates with bacon and hot bread, and the big tin cups of coffee, without milk, were disposed of with evident relish, born of exercise and good digestion.

After the earlier evening hours had been whiled away with song and jest, one by one the pilgrims retired to their respective covered wagons, wrapped their blankets round them and maybe with boots beneath their heads for a pillow, sought the peace of sleep. Now and then the voice of some exuberant youth yet untamed would break the stillness of the night with an old song inappropriate to the hour, and from out some remote wagon another would join in the refrain.

As the mariner on the first glimpse of the morning light looks out toward the sky to see what are the signs for the coming day, so on their first morning in camp the boys, hearing the murmur of raindrops on their wagon covers or tents, looked out to take an observation, and discovered indications of an approaching storm.

After the first preliminary gusts, the weather settled down into a steady rain, which continued thirty-six hours. It was deemed inexpedient so early in the trip to subject the men to unnecessary exposure, and the party was continued in camp. There were many duties to perform. The guard for the stock was changed periodically, but the boys in general devoted their energies to keeping dry and to drying out what had become wet. This was no easy matter, because the camp became surrounded by a sea of mud, and little comfort could be derived from an open, out-of-door bonfire, upon which the heavens were sending a drenching rain. The meals were served largely in the wagons, in some of which a number of the party would gather for mutual comfort and warmth, the food being conveyed to them by self-sacrificing young men, who with a pail of hot coffee in one hand and tinware in the other, braved the elements for the common good.

They were already beginning to learn who were the good fellows, ready to do service, and who were the "gentlemen," too selfish or indifferent to share fully with others the responsibilities and sacrifices of this mode of life. Travel of the kind upon which they were embarking brings out the inward characteristics of men more quickly and thoroughly than can anything else. The spirit of Burns' *Grace before Meat* is consoling when all does not go smoothly:

> "Some hae meat and canna eat,
> And some wad eat that want it;

But we hae meat and we can eat,
Sae let the Lord be thankit."

The gloomy day was followed by a night of inky blackness, during which the April wind made the wagon covers flap incessantly, while the rain steadily rattled on the sheets and the air was chilly and penetrating. The conditions were not favorable to hilarity, and there was little noise except that caused by the elements; so until noon of the following day everyone sought to make the best of existing conditions, believing that, as had always been their observation, there never was a night so dark, nor a storm so severe that it was not followed by a sunburst.

CHAPTER III
The Advancing Wave of Civilization

HAVE you ever carefully watched the movements or caught the earnest spirit of the immigrant who, after traveling many hundreds of miles along the difficult roads through an unbroken country to a strange land, there seeks a spot where he may build a home for his family? Many of the young men in our party were on such a mission. That we may better understand the motives which inspired them and the movement of which they became a part, a retrospective glance seems almost necessary.

Having late in the thirties become the first scion of the pioneers in the country where I was born, I ought to be qualified to throw some light upon the experiences of the frontiersman, because primeval Wisconsin, as it lay untouched by civilization, and the inflow of its population as I saw it, left upon my mind vivid impressions. There was a blending of pathos and humor in the arduous lives of these builders of the nation.

Without then comprehending its significance, I had observed from time to time the arrival of sturdy and intelligent home-seekers from New England and New York, transporting their household effects in country wagons along the old, but almost impassable territorial road. I was once led to accompany two other children, who, with their parents, were on such a

pilgrimage. In their two-horse wagon were tightly packed a little furniture and a few boxes. The wagon cover had been turned that the view might be unobstructed. At one time the immigrants paused as they forded a running brook; they looked up and down the green valley; then they drove out from the road to the summit of a nearby knoll, where their horses were again rested. Here the father rose to his feet; he turned his eyes earnestly and intently now in one direction and now in another across the inviting stretches of unoccupied territory. An entrancing panorama of small valleys and vistas of groves, all clothed in soft verdure of June, was spread out before him; not a thing of man's construction, nor even a domestic animal, was visible on the landscape, except their faithful dog, which was scurrying among the hazel bushes.

To me there seemed a long delay. The father finally lifted his little, young wife so that she stood upon the wagon seat, supporting her with an encircling arm, his two boys standing before him. The children looked with wondering eyes, as he pointed to a far-away green meadow traversed by a brook, from near which rose a wooded slope. He asked if that would be a good place for a home. A simple but expressive nod, a tear in her eye, and a kiss on her husband's cheek, were the only signs of approval that the sick and weary wife was able to give. In later years, when I had learned their history, I knew better the meaning of the mother's emotion. The father drove down the bushy slope to the meadow, then taking his axe he crossed to the woodland,

and there he blazed a tree as an evidence of his claim. Returning to the shelter of another settler's home, he was welcomed, as were all comers, by the pioneers, and one little room was for many days the home of the two families once accustomed to eastern comforts. There they remained until the father could drive fifty miles to the Government land office, there perfect his title, and return to "roll up" his log cabin.

Such was the beginning of that colonization. I watched the first wagon train that later heralded the coming tide of thrifty Norwegians, and many of their trains that followed. I had never before seen a foreigner. They all followed round the Great Lakes in sailing vessels to Milwaukee. There they piled high their great wooden chests upon farmers' wagons by the side of which in strange, short-waisted, long-skirted woolen coats and blue caps, and with their women and children at their side, they plodded along on foot, first through the forests, then over the openings along the same territorial road. Both men and women often slept at night under the loaded wagons. I have observed them at their meals by the wayside where nothing was eaten but dry sheets of rye bread little thicker than blotting paper, and much like it in appearance. A few villages had then sprung up. From these the Norwegians scattered, chiefly among the hills, and there built little homes and left their impress upon the country.

But westward, and farther westward, the tide continued to flow. As some of the young men in our train were emigrating to the West to establish a home in the new country which

they had never seen, I now found myself to be a part of this wonderful westward movement and was again to share in its peculiar vicissitudes and experiences; however, as a participant, favored with special opportunities, observing others also borne forward in the flux of nations.

As our train was traversing the first five-hundred-mile lap to the Missouri River, we discovered that the homes beyond a certain point in Central Iowa seemed suddenly as it were to be few and far apart, leaving increasing stretches of unoccupied land between them. The population rapidly thinned out, until its last ripples were reached in the western part of the state, where the serenity of nature was hardly disturbed by the approaching flood of immigration.

There was already a line of small towns along the west bank of the Missouri, which were the starting points for transcontinental traffic, where freight was transferred from river steamers to wagons. Beyond the Missouri and a narrow strip of arable land along its western shore, lay the vast territory believed to be fit only for savages, wild beasts, and fur traders, a wide, inhospitable waste, which men were compelled to cross who would reach the Eldorado on the Pacific, or the mines in the mountains.

The line of demarcation between the fertile and the arid country was supposed to be well defined. On one side Nature responded to the spring and summer showers with luxuriant verdure; on the western side the sterile soil lay dormant under rainless skies. It was believed that immigration would certainly

be checked at this line as the ocean tide faints upon a sandy shore; but it had now begun to flow along a narrow trail across the desert to a more generous land beyond. To this trail our course was now directed.

It would be an exceedingly dull company of emigrants and ox drivers which while traveling together even through a somewhat settled country, and sharing with each other the free life of the camp, would not have among its members a few whose thoughts and activities would at times break out from the narrow grooves of prescribed duties. Our life of migration through the inhabited country was intensely interesting, furnishing many peculiar experiences, all flavored to some extent by the character and temper of the persons concerned. As the eagerness of the men to emancipate themselves from the restraints of civilization increased, they began soon to adopt the manners of frontiersmen, and to resort to every possible device within the range of their inventive powers for diversion.

Young Moore, who hoped to reach Oregon, was an exuberant fellow preferring any unconstrained activities to regular duties. In former days he had distinguished himself in "speaking pieces" in the district school. This training led him often to quote poetry very freely and dramatically. It was Moore who sighted the first game worthy of mention, when he observed two beautiful animals at the moment that they glided into a copse of bushes nearly half a mile from the train. Transferring the care of his team to another, he hastened for his gun and started upon the

first interesting hunt of the trip. This being really his maiden experience in the fascinating sport, he was desirous of winning for himself the first laurels of victory in the chase. Not knowing the nature of the animals to be encountered, he approached as closely as possible to the coveted game, penetrating the thicket where the animals were concealed. The first discharge of his gun probably wounded one of the animals which, by the way, had a means of defense that baffles the attacks of the most powerful foe. The more experienced drivers soon knew that he had encountered the malodorous *Mephites Americana*, commonly known as skunk. Both of the animals and possibly some unseen confederates of the same family, must have invoked their combined resources in the conflict with Moore, for the all-pervasive pungent odor loaded the air and was wafted toward us, seemingly dense enough to be felt. Moore retreated into the open and ran toward the train for assistance, but he was no longer a desirable companion. While it might be truly said that he was a sight, it might better be said that he was a smell.

The train moved on in search of pure air, and Moore followed, bearing with him the reminder of his unfortunate experience. Wheresoever he went he left behind him an invisible trail of odor which had the suggestion of contagion, and from which his fellows fled in dismay or disgust.

In the calm stillness of the next evening, when voices were easily heard at a distance, and when through the soft air of spring, perfumes were transmitted in their greatest perfection, Moore

stood alone, far away from the camp, and delivered an eloquent but pathetic monologue, concluding with the servant's words to Pistol, "I would give all my fame for a pot of ale and safety." Then across the intervening space he calmly discussed with his friends the advisability of burying his clothes for a week to deodorize them, a custom said to be common among farmers who have suffered a like experience. It was finally conceded that he should hold himself in quarantine for the night, and not less than a mile from the train, and that during the ensuing days his garments might be hung in the open air on the rear of the hind wagon. The sequel to this hunt was approximately forty miles long, for the train covered more than that distance before it ceased to leave in its trail the fragrant reminder of Moore's first essay in hunting.

On a Saturday the long train rolled through the comparatively old town of Milton, a little village settled in the forties by a colony of Seventh Day Baptists. As is well known, these people honor the seventh day, or Saturday, as their Sabbath, or day of rest. We filed through the quiet, sleepy town while the worshippers were going to their church. It seemed as if we had either lost our reckoning of time, or were flagrantly dishonoring the Lord's Day.

After we had passed through to the open country beyond, some of the boys who had been riding together in the rear and had been discussing the Sunday question brought to mind by this trifling occurrence, decided to interview our highest authority upon the subject, and accordingly rode alongside of Captain Whitmore, who had been riding in advance. "Captain," said one

of the party, in a dignified and serious manner, "we know that your recent life has been spent very much in the mountains and that you have not been a regular attendant at church, although we believe your wife to be a good Methodist. What has been your practice in this kind of travel with reference to Sabbath observance?"

"Well, now, my boy," replied the Captain, "I have never cared very much for Sunday or for churches, but you must know that when we get out on the plains we can't afford to stop all our stock to starve on a desert where there is no feed or water just because it is Sunday. Sometimes there may be grass enough on a little bottom for a night, but it will be cropped close before the stock lies down. To remain another night would mean starvation to the stock, which would be roaming in every direction. Of course I don't know the ranges as well as the buffaloes do, but there are a few places, and I know pretty near where to find them, where in most seasons stock can feed a second day, unless others have too recently pastured it. When I find such a place I lie over for a day and don't care if it is Saturday, Sunday or Monday. But," he added, with earnestness, "I want to tell you one thing. I have crossed the plains to the coast many times, and I can take a train of oxen or mules and turn them out one whole day every sixth or seventh day, free to range for twenty-four hours, and I can make this trip in less time and bring my stock through to the Pacific in better condition than any fool can who drives them even a little every day."

"Now, Cap," said one, "you are getting right down to the philosophy of Sabbath observance. Why can you drive farther by resting full days rather than to rest your stock a little more each day?"

"Well, I don't know, except that I have tried both ways. Animals and men seem to be built that way. Now, here's these Seventh Day Baptists whose Sunday comes on Saturday. They're all right, but they would be just as correct if they would regularly use any other day as the Sabbath, and I believe the Lord knew what we ought to have when he got out the fourth commandment. I know 'em all as well as you do. I think Mrs. Whitmore is right in going to church on Sunday, and in making me put on a clean shirt when at home, even though I do not go with her. It would be better for me if I would go with her, but I have roughed it so much that I have got out of the way of it."

Thus was announced the Captain's policy for our *quasi* weekly days of rest, and the affair was conducted accordingly.

As our train crawled across Rock River, whose banks were once the favorite hunting grounds of the Winnebagoes and Pottawattamies, I recalled a final gathering of the remnant of the latter tribe, which I witnessed, when, for the last time, they turned from their beautiful home and started in single file on their long, sad trail toward the setting sun, to the reservation set apart for them forever. We shall note more of this type of historical incident as we pass beyond the Missouri, for the white man was pushing the Indian year by year farther back into the wild and

arid lands then supposed to be of no use for cultivation.

The overshadowing events of more recent years cause us almost to forget that Zachary Taylor, Winfield Scott, Jefferson Davis, Abraham Lincoln, Robert Anderson of Fort Sumter fame, and other men who became distinguished in American affairs, were once engaged in pursuing the Sacs and Foxes up these streams which we crossed while on our journey to the land of the yet unsubdued Sioux and Cheyennes.

Passing beyond the Mississippi, and to the western limit of railroad transportation, I was joined at Monticello by my old friends, Ben Frees and Fred Day.

Walking back six miles from the frontier station we struck the camp in time for a late supper. The dark evening hours were brightened by a rousing bonfire that the boys had built. The shadows of night had long since settled down upon the camp, and, there being no apparent occasion for us to retire immediately, Ben, Fred and I wandered together out into the gloom far away from the now flickering camp fire, which like some fevered lives, was soon to leave nothing but gray ashes or blackened, dying embers. We had just come together after our separation, and we conversed long concerning the unknown future that lay before us, for no definite plans for our trip, nor even the route that we were to take, had been perfected, and this was the second of May.

Our footsteps led us toward a rural cemetery, some miles east of the town of Monticello, in which we had already observed a few white grave stones, indicating that the grim reaper had found

an early harvest in this new settlement. Our attention was soon attracted to a dim light slowly floating around the ground in a remote ravine within the enclosure. A lonely graveyard at night had never appealed to me as a place of especial interest, yet I had heard of one unfortunate, who in his natural life had done a great wrong; when consigned to the tomb, his spirit, unable to rise, was held to earth, and yearly on certain nights it hovered over the grave where his own body had gone to dust.

"Boys," said Fred, "that light is certainly mysterious; it is not the light of a candle." A slight chill ran up my spinal column, concerning which I made no comment. It was at once suggested that there was nothing we were able to do about it; moreover our diffidence and modesty naturally inclined us to avoid mixing up in the private, sub-mundane affairs of the departed, especially those with whom we had had no acquaintance, or whose character was uncertain. If, instead of this strange light, the appearance had been something of flesh and blood, we, being as we believed, quite courageous, would have proceeded at once to investigate its nature. Curiosity, however, led us to advance cautiously forward. Ben, being a trifle shorter than I, was permitted to move in advance, as I did not wish to obstruct his view. The phosphorescence, or whatever it was, soon ceased to move, and rested near a little gravestone, the form of which we could faintly discern in outline. Quietly drawing nearer, we caught the subdued sound of something like a human voice coming, as we believed (and as was truly the fact), from the earth;

the words, as nearly as we could understand, were, "help me out." Surely this was a spirit struggling to escape, and our approach was recognized. At that moment we were startled to discover an arm reaching upward from the earth. Another dark form, emerging from the shadow of a nearby copse of bushes, in the dim light could be seen approaching toward the extended hand, which it appeared to grasp, and a body was lifted to the surface, from which came the words of kind assurance, "It's all right, Mike." "Sure," said Ben, "that is an Irishman, and I think Irishmen are generally good fellows, but I believe they are robbing a grave."

Drawing still nearer we discovered that the light which we had observed was an old-fashioned tin lantern, suspended from a small tree, and its feeble rays now brought to our view a plain, wooden coffin resting upon the ground. Inspired by a better knowledge of the situation, we quickly came to the front, and, as if vested with some authority for inquiring concerning this desecration, we demanded an explanation, for it was now past midnight.

"And wad ye have all the facts?" asked the Irishman, as we looked into the open grave. We firmly urged that we must understand the whole situation. The two men glanced at each other. "Well," said one, "this man in this coffin ferninst ye, died last night of smallpox, and we were hired to bury him before morning, because ye wouldn't have a smallpox stiff around in the day time, wad ye?" The path out of the graveyard was tortuous and dark; in fact, we found no path through the dense underbrush,

but we reached the road in safety. Unseen and immaterial things are usually more feared than are visible and tangible objects. The combination of smallpox and spirits departed verges visibly on the uncanny.

On a tributary of the Des Moines River we found the first Indians thus far seen, possibly two score of miserable, degraded beings who were camping there. They had little of the free, dignified bearing of representatives of the tribes with which I had once been familiar. A little contact with civilization and a little support from the Government had made them the idle, aimless wanderers that nearly all savages become when under such influence. Keokuk, the successor of Black Hawk, and Wapello, became chiefs of the united tribes of the Sacs and Foxes, and along with Appanoose, a Fox chief, received reservations along these streams. Wapello was buried at Indian Agency near Ottutumwa, beside the body of his friend and protector, General Street.

Our men had not yet reached a state of savagery in which there was not occasional longing for the good things commonly enjoyed by civilized beings. Among these was milk. On the day that we met the Indians, and at some distance from the camp, a solitary cow was seen feeding on the prairie. Several days had passed since our men had been permitted to enjoy the luxury of milk for coffee. It occurred to Brant that a golden opportunity was presented, which if seized upon would place the camp under lasting obligations to him. He struck across the country and

gradually approaching the animal succeeded so thoroughly in securing her confidence that he soon returned with a pail of the precious liquid. The question arose as to whether or not Brant could set up a valid defense against a charge of larceny in case the owner of the cow, having proof that he had extracted the milk, should prefer charges against him. The case was argued at the evening session, and I preserved a record of the proceedings. Evidence was adduced to show that at the time the milk was taken, the cow was feeding upon the public domain, or what is known as Government land; that the grass and water which were taken for its support and nourishment were obtained by the said cow from public lands without payment therefor; that a portion of said grass taken by said cow and not required for nourishment did, through the processes of nature, become milk; that the said milk at the time of its extraction had not become either constructively or prospectively an essential part of said cow, nor could any title thereto become exclusively vested in the owner of said cow, except such milk as said cow should have within her when she should enter upon the premises of her owner. It was admitted that the milk was obtained from said cow under false pretences, by virtue of the fact that Brant's manner in approaching her was such as was calculated to cause any cow of ordinary intelligence to believe that he was duly authorized to take said milk. It was assumed, however, that under the statutes of Iowa there was no law by which said cow could become a plaintiff in a case, even through the intervention of a nearest

friend.

As the milk was to be served freely to all the boys for breakfast, and as we were desirous that all questions of justice and equity should be fairly settled before any property should be appropriated to our use which might have been unlawfully acquired, the jury, after prayerful consideration decided that as the food taken by said cow to produce said milk was public property, the milk also was the property of the public. We, therefore, used the milk in our coffee for breakfast. It was also the last obtained by the men for many months.

At this juncture I was to be sent upon a mission. There had been transported in the Captain's wagon a little more than $8,000.00 in currency to be used in the purchase of supplies. Whitmore was anxious that this currency, which was quite a large sum for that day, should be deposited in some bank in Nebraska City. Improvising a belt in which the money was placed, I started out alone for that town, and soon encountered heavy storms, which delayed progress. On one day in which I made a continuous ride of seventy-eight miles, one stretch of twenty-four miles was passed along which no house was visible. This indicated the tapering out of civilization and the proximity of the western limit of population in that territory.

On the 22d of May I crossed the Missouri River by a ferry, after fording a long stretch of flooded bottom lands to the landing, five days after leaving our train, and reached Nebraska City, then an outfitting point for transcontinental travel.

CHAPTER IV
A River Town of the Day

FROM the western boundary of the state that bears its name, the attenuated channel of the Missouri River stretched itself far out into the unsettled Northwest, projecting its long antennae-like tributaries into the distant mountains, where year after year the fur traders awaited the annual arrival of the small river steamers, which in one trip each summer brought thither supplies from St. Louis and returned with rich cargoes of furs and peltries. On the western bank of that turbid, fickle stream were half a dozen towns, known chiefly as out-fitting places, which owed their existence to the river transportation from St. Louis, whereby supplies consigned to the mountains, or to the Pacific Coast, could be carried hundreds of miles further west and nearer to the mining districts and the ocean than by any other economical mode of transit. These towns had, therefore, become the base of operations for commerce and travel between the East and the far West, and so remained until the transcontinental railroads spanned the wilderness beyond.

Nebraska City was a fair type of those singular towns, which possibly have no counterpart at the present time. Like many western settlements, Nebraska City was christened a city when in its cradle, possibly because of the prevailing optimism of all

western town-site boomers, who would make their town a city at least in name, with the hope that in time it would become a city in fact. The visitor to one of those towns at the present day is sure to be impressed with the remarkable metamorphosis wrought in five decades, if he stops to recall the hurly-burly and bustle of ante-railroad days when the great wagon trains were preparing for their spring migration.

It was at noon on the day of my arrival in Nebraska City when I debarked from the ferryboat and rode my horse up the one street of the embryo city until I discovered the primitive caravansary known as the Seymour House, which provided entertainment not only for man and beast but incidentally also for various other living creatures. The house seemed to be crowded, but with the suave assurance characteristic of successful hotel managers, the host encouraged me to cherish the hope that I might be provided with a bed at night, which would be assigned me later. After taking a hasty meal, being as yet undespoiled of the funds I had transported, I entered a bank, and with little knowledge concerning its solvency, gladly relieved myself of the burden of currency which I had borne for many days and nights. Then I strolled out upon the busy highway to see the town.

Rain had been falling intermittently for several days, leaving portions of the roadway covered with a thick solution of clay, but there were sidewalks which the numerous pedestrians followed. A panoramic view of the streets could not fail to remind one of the country fairs in olden times. Huge covered wagons,

drawn by four or five yoke of oxen, or as many mules, moved slowly up and down that thoroughfare. Mingled with these were wagons of more moderate size, loaded with household goods, the property of emigrants. I learned that the greater number of these were taking on supplies for their western journey. Many men, some mounted upon horses and others upon mules, were riding hurriedly up and down the street, as if speeding upon some important mission. All these riders seemed to have adopted a free and easy style of horsemanship entirely unlike that which is religiously taught by riding masters and practiced by gentlemen in our city parks. Their dress was invariably some rough garb peculiar to the West, consisting in part of a soft hat, a flannel shirt, and "pants" tucked tightly into long-legged boots, which were generally worn in those days. To these were added the indispensable leather belt, from which in many cases a revolver hung suspended. Men of the same type thronged the sidewalks; many of them with spurs rattling at their heels were young, lusty-looking fellows, evidently abounding in vigor and enthusiasm.

I conversed with many of them, and learned that the greater number were young farmers or villagers from the western and southern states. Some of them were wearing the uniform of the Northern or the Southern army. Assembled in and around the wide-open saloons there were also coteries of men whose actions and words indicated that they were quite at home in the worst life of the frontier. Hardly one of these men then upon the streets, as far as I could discover, was a resident of the city; all

seemed to be planning to join some train bound for the West. Such were some of the factors destined to waken into life the slumbering resources of the broad, undeveloped regions beyond the Missouri.

Wandering further up the street, my steps were attracted toward a band of Pawnee Indians, who had entered the town, and, standing in a compact group, were gazing with silent, stolid solemnity upon the busy scene. As was the custom with that tribe, their stiff black hair was cut so as to leave a crest standing erect over their heads. Their blankets, wrapped tightly around their bodies, partly exposed their bare limbs and moccasined feet, their primitive bows and their quivers of arrows. They had not yet degenerated into the mongrel caricatures of the noble red man that are often seen in later days, garbed in old straw hats and a few castaway articles of the white man's dress, combined with paint and feathers; but they stood there as strong representatives of the last generation of one of the proudest and most warlike tribes of America, the most uncompromising enemy of the Sioux, and as yet apparently unaffected by contact with civilization.

Led by a natural desire to learn what were the thoughts then uppermost in their minds, I cordially addressed them with the formal salutation "How," a word almost universally understood and used in friendly greeting to Indians of any tribe. A guttural "How" was uttered in return, but all further efforts to awaken their interest were fruitless. I was not surprised to discover that no language at my command could convey to them a single idea.

The subject of their revery, therefore, remains a secret.

I well knew, however, that we were then standing on a part of their former hunting grounds and that lodges of their tribe had often stood on that very bluff. Had I seen my home of many years thus occupied by unwelcome invaders, I, too, might have spurned any greeting from a member of the encroaching race. Those Pawnees certainly heard their doom in the din and rattle upon that street where the busy white man was arming to go forward through the Indian's country. They soon turned their backs on the scene and I saw them file again slowly westward toward the setting sun.

The time having arrived to return to the hotel, and, if possible to perfect my arrangement for a room, I retraced my steps. The hotel at night naturally became the *rendezvous* for all classes of people, if it can be properly said that there was more than one class. Most conspicuous were the rough freighters, stock traders, and prospective miners; and the few rooms were crowded to overflowing. Any request for a private room was regarded as an indication of pride or fastidiousness on the part of the applicant, and was almost an open breach of the democratic customs of the West. But I passed the night without serious discomfort and doubtless slept as peacefully as did my companions.

There were, however, other houses in Nebraska City for the entertainment of guests. It was another hospitable tavern and another well remembered night, to which I would now briefly refer. Accompanied by an older companion, I repaired

to this hostelry, because of our previous acquaintance with the proprietor, who had formerly been a genial old farmer near my native town and was known as Uncle Prude. He promised to "fix us up all right" after supper. Accordingly we stepped out under a spreading oak tree, where, upon a bench, were set two tin washbasins and a cake of yellow soap, while from a shed nearby a long towel depended, gliding on a roller and thoroughly wet from frequent and continued service, – all of which instruments of ablution and detergence we exploited to the greatest advantage possible. Sitting a little later at one of the long, well-filled supper tables, we wondered how Uncle Prude would dispose of the great number of people in and around his hostelry. At an early hour we signified our inclination to retire, and by the light of a tallow candle were escorted to a large room known as the ball room, so called because on great occasions, like the Fourth of July and New Year's night, it was used by the country swains and their lasses for dances. It was now filled with beds, with only narrow passages between them. A wooden shoe box, upon which was a tin washbasin and pitcher, stood near the end of the room. A single towel and a well-used horn comb still boasting a number of teeth, were suspended by strings. These, with four or five small chairs, constituted the furnishings. Some of the beds were already occupied by two persons, in some cases doubtless the result of natural selection. We took possession of the designated bed, blew out the light, and soon fell fast asleep. Later in the night we were awakened by the arrival of a belated guest, who

was ushered in by the landlord's assistant. Taking a careful survey of the long row of beds, the assistant pointed to the one next to that which we were occupying and said, "You had better turn in with that fellow. I see it's the only place left." Gratified by his good fortune in securing accommodations, the guest thanked his escort, sat down on a chair and with his foot behind his other leg proceeded to remove his long boots. The noise of his grunts, or the falling of his boots upon the bare floor, awoke his prospective companion, who, slowly coming to consciousness, addressed the newcomer with the remark in kindly accents, accompanied with a yawn, "Are ye thinking about coming in here with me, stranger?" "Wa'll yes," he replied, "Prude sent me up. He said you and I had about all that's left. Pretty much crowded here tonight, they tell me," and he was soon nearly ready to blow out the light. The man in the bed, apparently revolving in his mind some serious proposition, added, "I think it's nothing more than fair, stranger, to tell you that I've got the itch, and maybe you wouldn't like to be with me." As a fact that undesirable contagion was known to be somewhat prevalent in those parts. The announcement, however, failed to produce the expected result. The newcomer, apparently unconcerned, calmly replied, "If you've got the itch any worse than I have, I am sorry for you. I guess we can get along together all right," and then proceeded to turn down his side of the bed. The occupant jumped to the floor, hastily gathered up his wearing apparel and suddenly bolted out the door. With no word of comment, the last comer blew out

the light, turned into the vacant bed, and enjoyed its luxury the rest of the night. We were unable to identify the strangers on the following morning, but there were many questionings among the guests concerning the manner in which a certain affection may be transmitted.

On the following morning I had little choice but to follow the example of other transients and join the throng upon the street. It was not difficult to determine what thoughts were uppermost in the minds of the many men whom I met along that thoroughfare. I heard negotiations for the purchase of mules and oxen, and contracts for freight, often ratified with Stygian sanctity by the invitation to "go in and have something to drink." I was brought in contact with many men from Missouri and Kentucky. In negotiating for a small purchase, the price named by the seller was two bits. "What is two bits?" I asked. The gentleman from Pike County, Missouri, appeared to be surprised when my ignorance was revealed. After he had enlightened me, I found him to be equally dense when I proposed to give two shillings for the article, the shilling of twelve and a half cents being then a common measure of value in my own state.

The signs over many of the stores of the town appealed to the requirements of a migratory people, "Harness Shop," "Wagon Repairing," "Outfitting Supplies," being among those frequently observed. The legend "Waggins for Sail" was of more doubtful and varied significance. The symbols, "Mammoth Corral," "Elephant Corral," and other corrals, indicated stables

with capacious yards for stock, with rude conveniences which the freighter temporarily needs until he is out on the plains. The term "corral" was applied in the West to any enclosure for keeping stock and supplies, as well as to the circle formed by arranging the wagons of a train, as is the custom of freighters at night, for their protection and for other obvious reasons. In these regions the significance of the term widened so as to include any place where food or drink is meted out to men, instead of to mules, and signs bearing the word "Corral" were very common on resorts of that class. The sign "Bull Whackers Wanted," posted in many conspicuous places, was well understood by the *élite* of the profession to be a call for drivers.

The demand for firearms and knives seemed to be very active. The majority of men who had recently arrived from the East seemed to regard a revolver as quite indispensable, even in Nebraska City. As a fact, however, they were equipping for the plains. The local residents who were busy in their stores selling supplies apparently had no use for revolvers, except to sell them as fast as possible.

Near the foot of the street is the levee, where at that season of the year many steamers arrived and departed, their freight being discharged and transported to warehouses, whence the greater part of it was reshipped by wagon trains to the far West. I went aboard one of the steamers and looked down upon the scene of feverish activity. The merchandise was being rushed ashore, that the boat might be hurried back to St. Louis, whence all freight

to these towns was then brought. The busy season was brief, and time was money.

A mate stood near the head of the gangplank urging the colored deck hands to move more rapidly. The fervent curses that he hurled at the men seemed to tumble over each other in the exuberance of his utterance. While thus engaged, a coatless man walked rapidly up the gangplank and with clenched fists approached the officer thus busied with his exhortations. In threatening tones and manner and with an oath he notified the mate that he had been waiting for him and now – . The mate, anticipating the man's evident purpose, instantly caught the spirit of the occasion and without awaiting the full delivery of the threat, himself delivered a powerful blow between the intruder's eyes, which unceremoniously tumbled him into an open hatchway nearby. Casting a brief glance through it into the hold, he asked the visitor if there was any one else around there that he had been waiting for. The mate then turned on the deck hands and cursed them for stopping to see the sport. The "niggers" displayed their teeth and smiled, knowing that the mate would have been inconsolable had there been no witnesses to his encounter.

On the 30th of May, eight days after my arrival at Nebraska City, our train arrived on the opposite side of the river, and I went over to assist in the crossing. The stream had overflowed its banks and night and day on its bosom a mighty drift of logs and trees went sweeping by.

"River, O River, thou roamest free
From the mountain height to the deep blue sea."

There was, however, no tint on the rushing, rolling waters of the chocolate-colored Missouri that could remind one of the ocean blue.

The diary of a journey such as we embarked upon is probably of more interest in those features that deal with early western life under then existing conditions than in geological or archaeological observations. With this idea in mind, I venture to narrate an incident as it was told me on meeting our outfit at the river. The train had come to a halt in the village of Churchville, Iowa. Just before the order to "Roll out," was given, a youth apparently fifteen or sixteen years of age, approached and expressed a desire to see the proprietor of the expedition. Captain Whitmore was indicated as that person. The youth requested permission to accompany the train to Nebraska City, to find an uncle. The Captain cast glances at the boy, whose fine, clear complexion, delicate form, and quiet, unassuming manners indicated that he was probably unaccustomed to a life of exposure and was hardly fitted to enjoy the rough experience of an ox driver. "Young man," said the Captain, "I guess this will be a little too severe for you; I hardly think you will like this kind of travel." On being assured that no fears need be entertained in this matter, but that the boy was not able to pay the high rate

of stage fare, the permission was finally granted. The impression really made upon the Captain was similar to that made by Viola on Malvolio, as given in *Twelfth Night*, where he is made to say:

"Not yet old enough for a man nor young enough for a boy! as a squash is before 'tis a peascod, or a codling when 'tis almost an apple; 'tis with him in standing water between boy and man. He is very well-favored and he speaks very shrewishly."

The boy immediately, as if by instinct or delicacy, took a position in the train with Mrs. Brown, the cook's wife. As an assistant the youth did not assume the fresh manners expected from the average boy who is gifted with attractive features and fine temperament, but rode quietly along from day to day. In the course of time the Captain was led to entertain a suspicion concerning the youngster, which was finally embodied in a question concerning his sex. Without hesitation the boy frankly admitted that he was a girl. Being exposed so suddenly and among so large a number of men, she burst into tears, a very natural mode of expression among women.

Her story was short. It was a story of wrongs suffered at the hands of a step-father, and of desire to find an uncle in the West, which she had taken this method of accomplishing. "But where's her hame and what's her name, she didna choose to tell." She admitted having her proper apparel in her satchel, which was substituted for her male attire in the house of a farmer nearby. She then returned to the train and finished her journey, keeping herself in close company with Mrs. Brown. I saw the

young woman soon after meeting the train. She was certainly a handsome, refined, modest-looking village girl, not more than nineteen years of age. We may catch another glimpse of the young girl's life later.

There have been but few writers who have laid the scenes of their romances in the far West, but there are numerous bits of history, supplied by the social life of the pioneers, like this truthfully-related incident, which the pen of a ready writer might turn into a tale as beautiful and interesting as that of Viola, who in the role of page enacted her part and "never told her love."

On Saturday, June 2nd, additional crowds of people were attracted to the town by its first election, at which an opportunity was offered the people of the territory to vote upon the question of "State or no State." We learned later, that the vote of the people as might have been expected was in the affirmative, but on President Johnson's failing to approve the measure, statehood was for a time denied them.

Our train passed on through Nebraska City and camped six miles westward. We discovered later that the congestion of travel on the one thoroughfare of the town was really the result of the lack of business. The amount of freight to be moved from the river towns was less than had been expected, and the shippers being unwilling to pay the rates that had prevailed in former years, the freighters were refusing to carry the merchandise and were lingering in the towns expecting better prices.

In the course of a few days some expected friends arrived

from Wisconsin with special merchandise and horse teams, and without waiting for the ox train, it was decided that a few from our party should separate from the others and with horse teams proceed westward at once. Negotiations with reference to a common interest in the mercantile venture were finally perfected. We purchased the supplies of provisions for our journey, and after supper, on June 8th, pulled out five miles from the town to our first Nebraskan camp. The sun had hardly set, closing the long June day, when our party, now brought together for the first time on this expedition, found its members all rounded on the grass in a prairie valley and half reclining upon boxes and bags, discussing the future.

There was Peter Wintermute, a powerful, athletic young man; he was six feet and three inches in height, and his long legs were stretched out upon the grass. He was an experienced horseman, and had a team of four fine animals with a modest wagon load of merchandise of some value, which it was proposed to retail somewhere in the West. Paul Beemer, his wagon companion, interested in the venture, was a small, nervous, untiring fellow, and a fine shot with a rifle. This Peter and Paul had few of the characteristics of the Apostles whose names they bore. It is written of Peter, the Disciple, that on one occasion he swore and repented. I fail to recall the occasion when our Peter did not swear – and that is only one of many points of dissimilarity.

In the circle sat Daniel Trippe, another giant in strength and activity, cultured and well informed on current and general

topics, a man of fine presence and wonderfully attractive in manner and appearance. Noah Gillespie was financially interested with Dan in a proposed manufacturing project in Idaho. Our Daniel, like his great prototype, was something of a prophet and seer, indeed also something of a philosopher, and his pronouncements were frequently invited. The similarity between our Noah and the great navigator of diluvian days lay chiefly in the fact that Gillespie also had met with much success in navigation – while propelling a canoe in duck hunting on the Wisconsin lakes. Moreover, so far as reported, the patriarch drank too much wine on but one occasion, whereas our Noah excelled greatly in tarrying too often at the wine cup; but he was a good fellow and a valuable companion in time of peril. Noah and Dan had a fine team.

A grand old man was Deacon Simeon E. Cobb, who now sat in the circle upon an empty cracker box, which he frequently used throughout the trip. He was trying the life on the plains in the hope of relieving himself of dyspepsia. He had a team and a light wagon with personal supplies, including a small tent. Henry Rundle and Aleck Freeman were also in the circle. They were vigorous, hardy and reliable men and they too had a team. The especial companions of the writer were Ben Frees and Fred Day. Ben was a compactly-built fellow of elephantine strength, and although only twenty years of age, had been a first-lieutenant in a Wisconsin regiment before Richmond at the surrender. Fred, who was still younger, was delicate but vivacious and buoyant and

abounded in all those qualities that make for good fellowship.

And now spoke Dan, saying, "Boys, it's all right where we are now, but only last summer on the Big Blue, only a little west of us, the Indians were raiding and destroyed nearly all the stations from there on, beyond and along the Platte. Keep your rifles in their proper places, loaded and in perfect order." "All right, Dan," said Fred, "we'll keep 'em loaded until we fire 'em off." Each of the party had in his wagon a Henry repeating rifle and plenty of ammunition. Our supplies consisted chiefly of bacon, flour, coffee and sugar, no available canned goods then being on the market. With these preparations, we continued in the morning out upon the broad plains.

CHAPTER V
Our Introduction to the Great Plains

"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing leave behind us,
Footprints on the sands of time."

IT was in the gray light of the quiet early dawn, when all members of the camp except one were in peaceful slumber, that these familiar lines of Longfellow's heartening lyric were suddenly howled forth from the interior of Fred's tent. Coupled with the ill-mated refrain, that dignified stanza had been often sung by boys like Fred, who persistently turned the serious things of life to levity. Because of frequent showers it had been really decided to make an early morning start, if conditions should prove favorable. Ordinarily Fred did not aspire to catch the worm, and in fact, after rousing the camp he lapsed back into his blanket and was the last man out for further service, in remarkable fulfillment of the famous Scripture. He had brought his companion, Ben, to his feet, who inflicted on him some harmless punishment for his breach of the peace.

"Co chee co lunk che lunk chelaly,"

Aroused by Fred's ill-timed outburst, I poked my head outside my wagon cover and surveyed the situation. The white-covered prairie schooners were parked in a row, as they had been on the preceding night. The two little tents, one of which sheltered the venerable deacon, stood side by side. Not far distant our horses were picketed by ropes. At this first indication of human activity, the faithful animals one by one scrambled to their feet, shook their manes, and doubtless expected the usual supply of morning oats, in which expectation they were doomed to disappointment, for hereafter they had to make an honest living by foraging on the country. There was sufficient light to reveal the sparkling of the heavy dew upon the grass. Fred's matin song had accomplished its purpose, and many good-natured but vigorous epithets were thundered toward his tent by members of the party as they emerged from their wagons, and he himself was finally pulled forth from his lair.

It seems needless to state that to some members of our party who were early pioneers of Wisconsin, a primeval forest, or a broad, virgin prairie was not an unfamiliar sight. Nevertheless, there was something in the expanse of the Nebraska plains as they then were, before the farmer had desecrated them, that was wonderfully impressive. The almost boundless stretch of undulating green extended in every direction to the horizon, at times unrelieved by a single tree or shrub, and only now and then we observed the winding course of some little stream indicated

by a narrow line of small timber half hidden in the valley, whose inclined and stunted growth told of the sweeping winds that had rocked them. Even those thin green lines were few and far between.

Bryant beautifully described this type of scenery when he wrote of the prairies:

> "Lo, they stretch
> In airy undulations far away,
> As if the ocean in its gentlest swell
> Stood still, with all its billows fixed
> And motionless forever."

We finally reached a little, solitary sod hut, which a pioneer had recently constructed. Not another work of man was visible in any direction. If Cowper sighing "for a lodge in some vast wilderness" had been placed in control of this sequestered cabin, his ardent desire would have been fully realized. It seemed as if it might well afford to any one grown weary of the wrong and outrage with which earth is filled, a spot where he might spend his remaining days in unbroken peace and quietude. But no! this cabin was but a little speck in advance of the on-coming tide of human life whose silent flow we had seen slowly but steadily creeping westward across the Iowa prairies. Thousands of men released from service in the army were turning to the West for homes, and the tens of thousands of foreigners landing at the Atlantic ports were then as now spreading over the country,

adding volume and momentum to the westward movement.

The following night found us beside a little brook, on the banks of which wild strawberries were abundant. Our horses were picketed on the range, each being tied with a rope fifty feet in length, attached to an iron pin driven into the ground, as was the usual custom. Aleck Freeman, however, concluded to tie the lariat of one of his horses to the head of a nearby skeleton of an ox. In fact, Aleck commented duly upon his own sagacity in conceiving that idea. All went well until the horse in pulling upon the rope, detached the skull from the remaining vertebrae. The animal seemed to be mystified on observing the head approach him as he receded, and for a moment regarded it thoughtfully and inquiringly. Backing still further away, he gazed with growing apprehension at the white skull, which continued to pursue him at a uniform distance. The horse evidently was unable to comprehend the cause of this strange proceeding and, like a child frightened at an apparition which it does not understand, his first impulse was to escape. He therefore gave a vigorous snort, wheeled, and with head high in the air, suddenly started southward toward the Gulf of Mexico. The faster the horse ran, the louder rattled the skull behind him. An occasional backward glance of the flying animal revealed to him the same white skull still pursuing, and at times leaping threateningly into the air as it was pulled over any slight obstruction; and thus they sped wildly away until they disappeared from sight. Aleck watched the affair from afar with dismay. What could stop the flight of this Pegasus

but sheer exhaustion? It was soon many miles away. Securing another steed and starting in pursuit, he too was soon lost to view. In the late hours of the night he returned to camp leading the tired runaway, and himself too tired and hungry to tell his story until morning. It seems that about seven or eight miles away the skull had caught in a cottonwood bush, which was fortunately on an upward grade and the speed of the horse was temporarily slackened. The animal doubtless believed that the skull for the moment had stopped its pursuit, that it also was very weary. The horse when reached was well fastened and easily captured. Aleck urged that the Government authorities should have cottonwood bushes set out on all the hills of Nebraska, and that the heads of all carcasses on the prairie should be securely tied to the rest of the skeleton.

Violent storms of wind and driving rain, accompanied by terrific lightning, forced us at noon to camp in the mud beside a swollen brook. We endeavored to build a fire in the wet grass, for we sighed for coffee. The combined skill of our best hunters failed to start a blaze. We were wet to the skin, and our saturated boots with trousers inside, down which the water ran in streams, were loaded with black Nebraskan mud; for every man had been out in the storm to picket his horses securely, as they were uneasy during the tempest. The few chunks of tough bread culled from the remnant found in the mess box served but little that night to fill the aching voids.

Not far away on a hill slope was an unoccupied frame house

not yet completed. This building, which was about twenty-five miles west from Nebraska City, was the last farmhouse that we passed, but even here there was no sign of cultivation. To this, as the day was closing, we plowed our way through the mud, for the storms continued. Its partly finished roof furnished us a welcome protection through the following stormy night. A peck of shavings more or less was equitably distributed among the party for bedding, but there were no facilities for building a fire without igniting the structure itself. On the floor we endeavored, with our internal heat, to steam our garments dry. We had previously observed a few huts built of sod, with roofs of the same material laid upon poles. I ascertained that at least one of those structures was strengthened by a framework of logs, but the scarcity of timber and the expense of transporting it from where it was produced, led to the use of the more available material. The huts were similar in appearance to many that I have seen in Ireland, though the fibrous Irish sod cut from the bogs of the Emerald Isle is more durable – like all else that is Irish!

A few ducks and plover had fallen before the Noachian and were gladly appropriated in the mess department, but we were on the *qui vive* for bigger game. We had been tantalized daily by dubious reports of antelope alleged to have been seen in the distance, and had been anxiously watching for an opportunity to test our Henry rifles on this elusive game.

Paul Beemer was a veritable Nimrod, always vigilant, frequently scanning the horizon for signs of animal life. Riding

ahead of the wagons, he suddenly announced the discovery of antelope on a far away hillside. It was a long *detour* for Paul to outflank his game and get to the leeward of it. "Not this time, Paul," said Dan, but Paul made the attempt, and the airy creatures, whatever they may have been, were quickly gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream. Noah, who claimed to have had a good view of the animals, declared that they were foxes, but Paul indignantly replied that his own verdict was absolutely final.

After six days' progress through storms and mud, we crossed tributaries of the Big Blue River, where the preceding year numerous Indian raids had occurred and many travelers had been massacred. We had not as yet seen a Red Man since we left Nebraska City. The sun was now shining brightly on the scene of the recent carnage, but we discovered no trace of those disastrous struggles with the savage warriors of the plains. I wandered off from the trail alone. Not a moving object dotted the graceful undulations of the green prairie, which lay peaceful in the June sunlight. Not a sound came from hill or valley. The perfect silence was impressive. It is well now and then to be thus alone, where no distraction turns one's thoughts from the serene face of Nature.

Despite all this apparent serenity, we knew not what enemy might lurk in those unseen valleys, which lately were the hiding places of bands of the subtle Sioux. We had already perfected our organization for protection, as was then the practice with all trains in the West. Each man took his turn standing guard at

night, the first watch being until midnight, when the next in order was called to remain on duty until the cook for the week was summoned in the morning. Deacon Cobb was excused from this service, despite the Gospel injunction on all to watch as well as pray, as was also the cook during his week of service.

This cooking "proposition" presented something of a problem. The training which we had received in domestic science was rude and elementary, even compared with that now given in colleges for women. The so-called bread, which was in general the only article that was prepared and baked for our use, was seldom fit for human nourishment. The flour was stirred with water. A little shortening and soda were introduced with no well defined idea as to the proper quantity of each. This chemical compound was put into a skillet, a cast iron pan having a cover of the same material, with a short handle. It was then placed upon the open camp fire, which was made of such combustible substances as the country afforded, rarely wood. The duration of the baking process was regulated by that inestimable faculty which Yankee housewives call "gumption." Few if any of our party were endowed therewith in high degree. Sometimes our bread was of the consistency of putty; at other times the surface of the loaf was burned to a blackened crisp. But we did improve by practice, profiting by the censorious comments of the disgusted eaters who for the time were not managing the mess. We had no vegetables, milk, butter, or eggs. Bacon was the staple article of diet. The coffee was boiled in an open kettle, and

served as black as night and strong as it was black. The earth was our table and all our tableware was tin. There were no lines of caste by which the cook was relegated to a lower social level than the banqueters, and if any one should too severely criticise the flavor of his coffee the cook would be apt to rise to the dignity of his office, seize the iron skillet, and threaten to terminate the existence of persistent grumblers. And Deacon Cobb highly relished this diet of bread nearly as tough as cork and took it with fresh air as a possible specific for dyspepsia and therewithal professed to be truly thankful.

Later observations made after we reached the main line of travel indicated that similar fare and experience were enjoyed or endured by other travelers. It was a matter of common remark that those who in seriousness did the most kicking concerning the food were such as either drank the most whiskey or did the least work, yet it is also true that both the mind and the maw must be in prime condition to respond uncomplainingly at all times to the rough fare of camp life, such as we provided. Very interesting it was to watch the rapid cleansing of the culinary utensils after breakfast, for an early start was usually desired. There were three methods of accomplishing this work, which in our camp were technically known as sanding, grassing and washing. The first two processes were regarded as preferable, chiefly by reason of the fact that the work involved could be accomplished with greater expedition. It may be explained that sanding consists in revolving the dish or kettle in the soil,

preferably sand, – which is certainly an economical method. Grassing is simply the use of grass or any similar material for the same purpose. Washing is a more complicated and laborious process, as the water sometimes must be brought some distance, and water without soap fails to develop any chemical affinity for the residuum of fried bacon. An occasional sanding kept the plates in such excellent condition that at times it could be plainly seen or at least gravely suspected that they were tinware. The sanitary condition of the culinary department was as good as circumstances would permit. The provisions which may have been cooked and were being transported to another camp, or articles which had been prepared for cooking, were carried on the tail end of the wagon in what was known as the mess box, a simple box with a lid. No flies or other insects were permitted to enter the box except such as could pass through the half-inch opening beneath the cover; and any accumulated dust that had gathered upon the food during the day's journey was carefully shaken from it, at least in good measure.

A short distance west of the Big Blue, we made a descent upon a village of prairie dogs, the first that we had seen. Paul and I quickly despatched two of the inhabitants. Scores of the little rodents sat upon the mounds, which were only a few feet apart, marking the entrances to their subterranean homes, into which many of them would instantly drop like a flash on the slightest cause of alarm. These were the alert and vigilant sentinels which until danger threatened sat upright and

motionless upon their earthworks and appeared like inanimate objects. The heroic few, which after an alarm faithfully remained upon their parapets, uttered frequent shrill, short barks, each accompanied by a vigorous wiggle of their dark little tails. What useful function this wiggling subserved I know not, unless it was a semaphoric signal to their comrades in the intrenchments beneath, but the wiggle aided in making the little animals more conspicuous and therefore easier marks. The prairie dog villages in that day frequently covered areas of sixty or seventy acres and undoubtedly sheltered a dense population. We frequently inspected the exterior of their premises, but during that investigation all was as silent as a city of the dead, and one would hardly suspect that a labyrinth of corridors abounding in active life existed beneath the surface.

In the middle of one forenoon, out upon that treeless, rolling prairie, all were riding lazily along, when someone observed a covered wagon far off at the right, just as it was descending behind a gentle slope. Was it possible that there could be another trail to the North? If there was, it was equally true that we might be on the wrong course, for we were supposed to be steering for the Platte River, which was also in the same direction. An investigation revealed the fact that one of our wagons was missing. Mounting a horse I rode rapidly over the prairie and in half an hour overtook the prairie schooner which was marking an entirely new trail of its own across the virgin green. Riding up beside the horses and looking in beneath the canvas, I discovered

one occupant, and that was Uncle Simeon Cobb, who in a sleep as peaceful as that of childhood was unconscious of the fact that in his advanced years he was wandering far away from the true path out into an unknown wilderness.

"Hello, Deacon," I shouted, and the old gentleman slowly roused himself from his slumbers and after rubbing his eyes looked out upon the pathless prairie. "Well, by George," he remarked, passing to the extreme limit of his profane vocabulary, "I must have been asleep." His horses being halted, I explained to him how he happened to be discovered. Our little train was already out of sight and he promptly admitted that he was unable to tell from which side of the trail his horses had turned; and the tracks of his light wagon not being distinct he could hardly have retraced his course. The deacon was invariably calm and self-possessed and with a keen sense of the humorous in every situation. He therefore gravely stated that it seemed providential that he should be reclaimed from his wanderings in time for lunch. Having been escorted back to the train, it was decided that in the future he should not drive at the tail end of the procession, as he had done previous to that time.

The night of the 16th was glorious with a waxing moon. It was my turn on guard for the watch until midnight. As I sauntered off toward where the stock was picketed, with my rifle on my shoulder, my attention was called to the incessant yelp of the prairie wolves. In my timid excursions into Greek mythology I had read something of Orpheus and his lyre. The recollection of

the alleged power of his melodies over animate and inanimate objects, led me quietly to enter our wagon and take out the violin with which I had occasionally whiled away an hour; and seated on the ground I drew the bow to the best of my ability. The night was so still that the sound was doubtless carried a great distance and evidently reached the sensitive ears of numerous wolves on their nocturnal prowl. The response was certainly tremendous. In a few minutes I had an enthusiastic audience in the not far distance, which might have been regarded as highly complimentary had it not been quite so demonstrative. Strangely enough, the music failed to calm their spirits until I had ceased for a time to torture the catgut. Whenever the sound of the instrument reached them, the din of yelps was returned from all points of the compass. The prairie wolves are simply scavengers and though possibly subject to pleasurable emotions (probably otherwise in the instance just given) yet their chief concern is to supply their ravenous appetites. Like vultures they scent the carrion from afar, and as it was Paul's week to cook they may have sniffed the aroma of his burnt bacon wafted to their acute olfactory nerves through the still air of the night. After the camp is vacated, and the wolves can find no food in a more advanced state of decomposition than the few morsels which the camper leaves behind, they will then regale themselves on the scraps left around the abandoned campfire.

On the following day, after crossing many deep gullies, we struck the Platte River trail from Omaha, which follows near the

southern bank of that stream.

CHAPTER VI
The Oregon Trail

WE were now upon the most frequented thoroughfare of western transcontinental travel, known as the old Oregon trail, and this course was pursued for the succeeding two weeks. It was the route taken by Major Stephen Long, who in 1820 explored this valley as far west as the junction of the North and the South Platte. It also appears to have been followed by Captain E. D. Bonneville and his company in 1832, and in 1834 and 1839 by Whiteman and Spalding, the missionaries to Oregon; also by Colonel John C. Fremont in 1842, when on his first exploring expedition.

While these western trails may not have been the scenes of conflict in which numbers were engaged on any one occasion, nevertheless, for two generations they have doubtless been the theatre of a greater number of encounters with Indians than have ever occurred in any other equal area of our country. The reasons for this become apparent on a moment's thought. The numerous tribes that occupied this vast territory were in every sense of the word warriors, having had experience in their peculiar mode of warfare in frequent conflicts between the tribes. The majority were expert horsemen, which peculiarly fitted them for guerrilla tactics. The California, Pike's Peak, and Mormon settlements

formed nuclei for a rapidly increasing population, the supplies for which were transported chiefly by this thoroughfare across the plains, which until a later date remained the undisputed home of these nomadic tribes.

The travel across this broad stretch of Indian territory was in the main confined to a very few well defined pathways through an open, unprotected country on which the strength of a traveling outfit could be fairly estimated by the enemy concealed in the many hiding places in ravines intersecting the prairie, so that freighter and emigrant were exposed to unexpected forays at any moment, and especially when the relations with the Indians were not entirely friendly. It was exceedingly difficult, at times, for the traveler to ascertain with certainty what was the present spirit of any tribe. An unprovoked wrong inflicted by some one reckless white man upon an Indian was liable to be avenged by an attack on some train, the owners of which were ignorant of the inciting cause. In like manner, the insult of a white by an Indian led to the conclusion that the tribe was hostile and on the war-path, and the freighters governed themselves accordingly. The reckless destruction of buffaloes by the whites was the cause of intense bitterness on the part of the Indians; and moreover, the ill-adjusted relations between our War Department and the tribes, to which we may make future reference, were not always favorable to a friendly attitude on the part of the Indian.

This Oregon trail, however, as far as it followed the main channel of the Platte River, had now become a well-traveled,

natural road. Because of the fact that the country remote from this stream was arid and devoid of water courses, the Platte valley was the only practicable route for freighting, except the one far south along the tributaries of the Arkansas.

On my first opportunity I took a stroll back from the river to the bluffs, which were three or four miles distant, and which mark the boundary between the valley and the higher lands to the south, with a view to ascertaining if there were any evidence of civilization beyond. The air was wonderfully clear, dry, and hot. There was a marked contrast between this country and the prairies of Eastern Nebraska. The thin grass was parched and brown, and the surface of the valley was barren and apparently lifeless. A solitary black buzzard, poised upon a carcass which I passed, added but little of attractive life to the inanimate scenery.

Observing the skeletons and carcasses of numerous buffaloes it occurred to me to count those which I might pass on my walk to the foothills. The number observed near my path reached nearly two hundred. There are but few objects that could be more suggestive of desolation than were these huge, bleaching skeletons. The killing of the greater number of these buffaloes was doubtless a result of the vandalism of so-called sportsmen, who regarded even the crippling of a few of these noble animals as a laudable achievement, even though the buffaloes were shot while in a compact herd of a thousand or more. Hundreds of thousands of their bodies were scattered over the country, especially near the river valleys of Kansas and Nebraska. From

personal observation, it was evident that a great number of them were not killed by the Indians, because the skins, which were of value for their own uses, and for traffic with the whites, in many instances had not been removed.

Later in these records reference will be made to the vast numbers of these valuable animals, which we saw further South. In the interesting work of Colonel Henry Inman, statistics are given concerning the number of buffaloes killed in the thirteen years 1868 to 1881. He states that the facts as written were carefully gathered from the freight departments of the railroads, which kept a record of the bones that were shipped; and the quantities were verified from the purchase of the carbon works at various points from which was paid out the money for the bones. These figures show that during the period named there was paid out $2,500,000 for buffalo-bones gathered on the prairies of Kansas alone; and at the rate paid this sum represented the skeletons of more than thirty millions of buffaloes, a number that seems almost incredible. Sheridan, Custer, Sully, and Inman report having ridden in 1868, two years later than my visit, for three consecutive days through one continuous herd which must have contained many millions. The writer had a similar experience in the autumn of 1866. The wanton destruction of the last of these magnificent and valuable animals is but a single illustration of the folly and improvidence of the American people in dealing with their magnificent natural resources, and their disregard for the comfort and the needs of future generations.

The bluffs on the margin of the valley which have been already referred to, were next ascended. From them, looking outward over the high, rolling, and arid plains beyond, nothing could be seen except one interminable brown, with hardly a shrub visible, to relieve the dull monotony. Toward the north and skirted by a strip of cottonwood trees and brush, the turbid river glistened in the glaring light, its chocolate-colored waters bearing to the distant gulf its unceasing tribute of clay and sand. Here and there its tawny breast was scarred with barren sand bars, but over all the broad landscape nothing could be discerned that was the product of human agency save the distant trail near the river, along which our train was lazily creeping, like a wounded anaconda.

Buzzing around me, as if seeking some companionship on that lonely bluff, was a solitary bee. For some time I watched its erratic movements, hoping to discover the nature of its engagements. I could see nothing, except here and there a cactus or a thistle, from which it seemed possible that it could extract the sweets needed for future use. It was possibly an adventurer that had drifted off as I had done, from the parent colony. Bryant writes of this busy insect in words which, if applied to the future of this then desolate plain, seem prophetic:

"THE BEE"

"A colonist more adventurous than man

With whom he came across the eastern deep,
Fills the Savannas with his murmurings,
And hides his sweets, as in the golden age,
Within the hollow oak. I listen long
To his domestic hum, and think I hear
The sound of that advancing multitude
Which soon shall fill these deserts. From the ground
Comes up the laughter of children, the soft voice
Of maidens, and the sweet and solemn hymn
Of Sabbath worshippers. The low of herds
Blends with the rustling of the heavy grain
Over the dark brown furrows. All at once
A fresher wind sweeps by and breaks my dream,
And I am in the wilderness alone."

So vividly was mirrored in the poet's fancy the future of the Nebraskan desert. I must confess my inability, as I sat alone on the highest lump of earth available, to have in any degree forecast the future of that country, for I would have hardly given my jack-knife for all the land in sight, with forty years' exemption from taxes. Yet to me this waste was profoundly interesting and impressive, not unlike the great deserts of Africa, although I could see in it no promise or potence of prosperity. To one who has personally observed the final reclamation of those broad lands, the words of Bryant picture with wonderful accuracy the transformation that really has taken place, and my own early observations now seem like a dream.

In proof that my impressions were shared by others, we may

quote the statement of Colonel William A. Phillips, that at the Wyandotte convention, which was held about that time, the line of the future state of Nebraska was being drawn at the 100th meridian, which was supposed to be the border of the desert region. An attempt was being made to annex to it all the land south of the Platte, and delegates from Nebraska were in attendance to urge it. One delegate, a Mr. Taylor, who seemed thoroughly penetrated with the annexation idea, urged that the Platte River had a quicksand bottom, and could not be forded; that it could not be bridged, because there was no bottom, for piers; and that it could not be ferried, for want of water. In short, in the minds of many, Western Nebraska, with its river, its climate, and its expanse of sterile soil, was of no value except to hold other portions of the earth together. But there lay the great undeveloped West, its prairies and beyond these its mountains, an inert expanse ready to be developed into vast productive states rich in soil and minerals.

Returning to the train after my long tramp, we lunched, and after the usual noonday rest for the stock, mounted our horses and proceeded on our afternoon drive. We had not advanced far, when we saw that we were approaching a single covered wagon some distance ahead, near which were riding two young ladies, and a gentleman of fine appearance. Ben and Fred commented with much satisfaction on the agreeable prospect of meeting two interesting girls in whom they might find occasional companionship on the long journey that lay before us.

The gentleman addressed us cordially and naturally inquired whither we were bound. As a fact, we could not state definitely what our route would be beyond Julesburg, except that our first objective point was Salt Lake City. We learned that he with his family was destined for Denver, where he expected to follow his profession as physician. He ventured to introduce us to his daughters, one of whom was a brunette; the other bore a wealth of bright auburn hair, and was of fair complexion, except that a little tan and a few freckles, caused by the Nebraska sun and breezes, were noticeable. Their ages were between eighteen and twenty-one years, about the same as my companions. Fred was an attractive, cheerful young fellow, an agreeable converser, and always popular at home. Ben was more vigorous physically, and at once impressed one with his sterling qualities and good sense. So Dr. Brown, as we may now call him, expressed pleasure at the prospect of sharing with us the adventures of the journey. We camped near a ranch which a few months before had been attacked by the Indians.

Along this road, as far as Julesburg, these so-called ranches, strewn from eight to twelve miles apart, were maintained chiefly in the interest of Ben Holliday's stage line, for the care of the horses, which were exchanged at such stations. With few exceptions, the buildings were made of adobe and contained two rooms. No attempt even at simple gardening was made; in fact, we observed no phase of agriculture along this route. Some of the buildings were partially surrounded by a wall built of sods, as

an enclosure for the horses. The interior was for the main part a grog shop, with a combined sleeping and cooking room attached at the rear.

On the 18th of June, when fully ten miles from Fort Kearney, the flag of that post became visible in the distance, as we looked up the level valley. Ben and Paul hastened in advance to ascertain where we might camp. They returned to meet us, with the information that two miles in each direction from the Fort extended the Government reservation, and that a notice had been posted on the wayside forbidding the driving of teams across that property. On reaching these sacred precincts, we rode through on horseback and discovered that there was really no fort at Fort Kearney. There was a small plaza or park, bordered by cottonwood trees, in the center of which stood the flagstaff from which floated the nation's colors; near by were mounted two or three small brass cannon; around the plaza were built the barracks and officers' quarters, with other buildings used apparently by officers. A soldier was pacing back and forth before the open door of the magazine, and another was performing a similar duty in front of the guardhouse, from which came the notes of a familiar melody sung by the recreants within, who were making the best of their confinement. The only semblance of a fortification was an adobe wall facing the bluffs. The fort was garrisoned by two companies of the 5th U. S. Volunteers.

Fort Kearney is the oldest white settlement in the interior

of Nebraska, and was named after a general who served in the Mexican war. A station two miles west from the Government post was dignified by the name of Kearney City and embraced half a dozen small adobe structures, each of which was said to be a whiskey dive; its small population of men and women was apparently of a worthless type. The spot was usually referred to as Dobytown. The post itself was abandoned long ago.

We learned from the provost, that by order of the War Department, no trains were allowed to move westward with less than twenty wagons and thirty armed men. As yet we had seen no Indians, and travelers from the West made the same observation, but stated great numbers of Indians were reported to be in the vicinity of Laramie, where they were being fed and petted by Government agents as preliminary to an effort to make a treaty. Many travelers affirmed that the Indian agents were temporizing and procrastinating, and that some officers did not desire permanent peace, believing that it would make unnecessary certain fat offices then existing, and would also check opportunities for the profitable barter which was being conducted with the tribes.

The demands of these latter appeared to be that the Powder River country and the Smoky Hill route should be absolutely abandoned by the whites and left in the undisturbed possession of the Indians. The Red Man could not fail to recognize the fact that he was losing his most valuable hunting grounds by the encroachment of civilization, and the current belief among

the whites was that the Sioux were preparing to make trouble. In view of the general interest in the subject which prevailed, it was natural for travelers to exchange views upon it with those who might have any new information; and a stage station ranchman a few miles from Kearney also gave us his views on the situation. This man, after advancing some opinions concerning the personnel of the troops that had been sent for their protection (views that were anything but complimentary), said that a common expression among those not well informed was that one white man was enough for ten Indians. In front of the little ranch where we then stood, he had recently been witness to the fact that six Indians armed only with bows and arrows had driven ten cavalrymen, armed with carbines and revolvers, back into the ranch, where they were supported by a greater number of troops. We asked if any of the soldiers had been wounded. "Yes," he replied, "one of them intercepted an arrow which fortunately did not enter a vital part, but it did penetrate certain muscles in his back, which made it painful for him to sit." The action of the troops was reported in such glowing terms to the Department by the officer in command that the soldier who was shot in the back and could not sit, received a medal for his bravery. This, however, was not a fair report concerning the valor of our soldiers as a whole, for before that year ended some of them performed heroic acts and deeds of daring hardly surpassed in history.

We camped away from the trail, to the west of the post and in sight of the miserable huts of Dobytown. There was but

little feed for the stock, yet we had to remain. It was either at Dobytown or at the post itself, that a party of travelers who were parked near us secured a box containing bottles labelled "Hostetter's Bitters." These so-called stomach bitters were a widely advertised concoction purporting to be a valuable tonic and a never failing remedy for dyspepsia, and all the other ills that the stomach, and the inner man generally, is ever heir to. If the extraordinary box said to have been presented by Zeus to Pandora is worthy of mention as a magazine of innumerable pent-up ills, which a girl unwittingly turned loose among men, then surely the eminent Dr. Hostetter should have a high place in the classic lore of the future, as the fabricator of a bottled-up compound, which when uncorked, had wonderful potentialities, not in curing ills but in raising the devil generally. As already stated, the men purchased the box of bitters, which (as an eye-witness I testify) was as innocent in appearance as a box of bottles of pepper sauce. They also used the contents freely as a beverage, and soon were raving drunk. Having neither tasted nor analyzed this potent and invincible anti-dyspeptic and gastric regenerator, I know naught of its peculiar constitution and virtue, but am informed that its base is a poor grade of raw whiskey and is in fact the concentrated extract of "drunk." Having become absolutely delirious from their potations of the infallible specific, the revellers returned to the dens of Dobytown and began a season of Saturnalia which had not ended when we moved from that camp. Supplies of the tonic were secured by another party

and enjoyed with similar results.

As we traveled on we learned that the wonderful demand for this nervine was in some measure due to the convenient form in which it was sold; and that these bitters were the element frequently used in barter with the Indians, and for which they were ready to exchange their most valued possessions. Some men wonder why the Red Man is at times so insane in his brutality. The uncorking of bottles of bitters of this general type has caused more than one of our protracted wars with the Indians, and a cost of millions of dollars to our Governmeent, a fact that is attested by incontrovertible evidence. There were indeed other and more notable causes of our Indian wars. It must be understood that the savages knew nothing of our national boundaries made by treaty with Great Britain. Some tribes with which we have been at war roamed freely on both sides of that line. Every one of our territories from Wisconsin to the Pacific has furnished scenes of Indian conflicts with the Whites. Yet in some way, Canada has avoided these expensive experiences too terrible to describe. As we follow our vagabond life with the emigrants, and from time to time see the Indians in their various encounters, and dodge the massacres that befall our companions, we hope incidentally to discover some of the reasons why our Government has failed to cope successfully with this problem.

CHAPTER VII
Society in the Wilderness

LATE in the afternoon of June 18th, when the tin supper dishes had been laid aside and the men were enjoying their after-dinner smoke, the four closely parked groups of wagons, comprising as many camps separated from each other by perhaps a hundred feet in distance, seemed for the time to be in a condition of perfect serenity. The members of each party by itself were quietly awaiting developments.

Dan and I strolled out toward the fort, and from a distance watched the movements of mounted men at that post. Soon we observed a long mule train approaching from the east beyond Kearney. It halted for a few moments, and then like a huge serpent it slowly circled round the reservation; and by orders from the guards its wagons were finally corralled beyond our camp.

As was the custom with all large outfits, the train, although moving in an unbroken line, consisted of two divisions. On being ordered to corral, the head wagon of the first division made a sharp *detour* to the right, followed by the succeeding teams, and finally turning to the left, that division formed a great semi-circle. The first team was halted at a designated point at which was to be the opening of the proposed corral; and each of the mules of the succeeding teams of that division was made to swing suddenly

to the left after bringing the great wagons rather close together. On reaching the point from which the first division made its *detour*, the head team in the second division swung sharply out in the opposite direction, turning again as it advanced to meet the leading team in the first division, and before stopping, each of the teams of the second division was also made to swing suddenly toward the center of what became a great circle or enclosure in which all the mules were unharnessed and temporarily confined. This method of corralling was universal with western freighters.

In case of an unexpected attack, or for other obvious reasons a fortification of wagons was quickly made, with all the stock massed within the enclosure, and the work was accomplished in the time required for the train to travel its own length. The immense wagons of this train were of the type known as the Espenschied, a kind largely used by the Government. They were heavily built, with very high boxes projecting slightly both at the front and rear, like the ends of a scow boat, and like all wagons used on the plains, were roofed with regulation canvas tops supported by bows. After the three hundred or more mules of this train had been unharnessed, they were driven in a herd from the mouth of the corral several miles from camp, to a place where they might find some feed in the valleys, there to be guarded through the night by herders. All the processes in these evolutions were commonplace to any plainsman, but may not be entirely familiar to modern palace car travelers.

There also rolled round the Kearney reservation closely in

the wake of the big train, a small outfit consisting of half a dozen wagons with horse teams. Under directions from the post, it also camped on the barren bottom land west of the fort. There was, therefore, now camped upon the arid plain beyond Dobytown a sufficient number of armed men and wagons to meet the requirements of the War Department for two trains. It was accordingly ordered that the big mule train should pull out in the morning, and the remaining outfits should unite and follow in another body.

The muffled roar of the hoofs of the galloping mule herd, urged on by the yells of the mounted herders as they were rushing toward the corral, was the signal for the beginning of activities on the following morning. By the aid of the men the animals were driven into the enclosure. The vociferous braying of the mules mingled with the clamorous voices of the drivers, as each struggled to secure and bring into subjection his own big team of eight or ten mules. It was with remarkable celerity that the long-eared animals were harnessed to their respective wagons, and the command to roll out was given by the captain. Accompanied by the vehement shouts of the drivers and the cracking of whips, the train of forty wagons gradually uncoiled itself, stretching slowly out into the road, and in a solid line perhaps two-thirds of a mile in length "trekked" westward in a cloud of dust.

The time for our own departure soon arrived, and all who remained of the campers on the plains of Dobytown were ordered to move on. Doctor Brown's two wagons and our own

teams, lined out in the van, were followed by the two outfits with the Hostetter's Bitters, and the last arrival was in the rear. All were found to be properly armed, and all other requirements of the Government being satisfied, we were soon following the windings of the trail. Among other items of freight which were being transported by our combined outfit, was a full wagon load of whiskey in four-gallon tin-box cans, and another wagon containing material for a distilling plant to be used in Idaho.

The orders of the War Department did not provide that after leaving any post a train should thereafter continue as a consolidated organization. To avoid unnecessary dust, and for other reasons, it was therefore mutually agreed among the parties composing our train that we should separate at our convenience.

With love for the country as God has made it, we gladly rolled out westward from Kearney City; away from the hybrid civilization, its dirty dives, its gambling dens and gamesters, who, like the flotsam on the crest of a rising flood, have too often been upon the surface near the front of western migration, depraving and demoralizing even the savages.

Although the writer has devoted much time to travel, none of his journeys has been the source of more profound interest than were the first months spent in those broad areas of the West in which there were no visible traces of the white man's presence. The cities and states of America have struggled to increase their population by immigration, apparently on the theory that the rate of that increase was to be the measure of growth in

the happiness and prosperity of its people. When our national heritage shall have been partitioned among the nations of the earth, and the wild, wooded hillsides shall have been denuded by axe and fire, giving place for farms and cities, then they whose fortune it has been in childhood to roam through the primitive forests or over the yet free and trackless plains, would hardly exchange the memories of those years for a cycle on the streets of Constantinople or New York. Impelled by such sentiment, we soon separated from the train, to the mutual protection of which we had been assigned by the officers at Fort Kearney, and with the Browns took our chances against the Indians.

As soon as we were well away from the Fort, I again strayed out as I often did later, and with rifle upon my shoulder was soon striding over the highlands south of the river. It was a pleasant diversion to get out of the level valley, which at this point spread out some miles back to the bluffs. For a brief rest I selected an eligible spot, from which a wide view of the surrounding country was laid open. The atmosphere was wonderfully dry, clear, and exhilarating, and there seemed to be no suggestion of moisture either in the air or in all the broad landscape except in the muddy waters of the distant Platte. The thin grass, even thus early in the season, was scanty in growth and brown, as if touched by autumn.

Along the banks of the river further east we had in places observed trees, chiefly cottonwood, but from the bluff where I now stood, hardly a bush was visible save only upon the islands in the river, nearly all of which, except such newly formed sand

bars as from year to year are shifted by each successive flood, were rather well wooded, – I knew not, but wondered, why.

Recalling to mind the prairies and openings of the North Mississippi River country, I remembered that in many cases those prairies ended at the banks of a stream, on the other side of which a dense and extensive forest began sharply at the water's edge. Fox, Bark and other rivers, as they were sixty years ago, were fair illustrations of this fact, but now even those forests are gone. It seemed to me that timber must at some time have grown upon all those Nebraska plains and prairies. The fact that trees still remained where protected by a stream would indicate that far-reaching and probably repeated fires have swept across those countries and stopped at the shore. The destruction of large areas of timber would increase the aridity of the climate, just as the later cultivation of what was once the plains has caused an increase in humidity.

The belief to which such reflections seemed to guide me, that those western plains were once wooded, was strengthened by the discovery of large sections of petrified wood, which I found on the high and now treeless land farther west, apparently *in situ*, where they had grown. My side-trip out upon these uplands was inspired quite as much by a desire to hunt game, as to formulate theories concerning the prehistoric conditions of the country. Not strange, then, that I became suddenly interested in a small herd of antelopes, which I discerned some distance to the southward, the first that I had seen under favorable conditions.

Knowing their senses of smell and hearing to be wonderfully acute, I felt confident that no approach could be successfully made from the windward side, and that my movements must be carefully concealed if I hoped to get within reach of the vigilant animals, for the Henry rifle was not a long range gun. Being familiar with the oft repeated story, that expert hunters frequently attach a bright red handkerchief to the top of a ramrod, the other end of which is stuck in the ground, and that this decoy will attract the antelope, I determined to adopt that stratagem. I had a silk handkerchief, as did many men in that day. As repeating rifles have no ramrods, and no bush or stick was available, I propped up the gun, surmounted by the handkerchief, upon a little mound in sight of the game, and lying on my face, concealed in a slight depression, waited patiently for developments. The wary animals were not enticed by the sham allurement.

Any earnest hunter is willing to subject himself to any reasonable humiliation to achieve success. Therefore, upon my knees with rifle in one hand I crawled abjectly for a full hour over the gravelly soil, keeping to the leeward as much as possible. This devotional exercise was continued until I discovered that my trousers were worn through to the skin, and that the tissues were beginning to yield to abrasion, which threatened soon to reach through to the bones of my knees.

The mess certainly needed meat; therefore I adopted other tactics. Abandoning the fruitless efforts to reach the game by

stealth, I rose to my feet but was instantly discovered. I sent two or three shots at a venture as the little herd faced me, but the bullets fell short of the mark, and with a few bounds the game was over the hills and far away. It became clear to me that the capture of the alert antelope, on the open plain, is quite a different undertaking from the shooting of deer in the forest. It would have been a far greater pleasure, and quite as easy, to have written that I went back to the trail for horses, and again returned with two fine antelope which were proudly exhibited amid the grateful plaudits of the admiring camp! – but the statement would lack veracity if not verisimilitude. It is true, however, that we did secure several antelope later.

A description of this out-of-door life would be incomplete if it failed to give at least a glimpse of a certain type of unanticipated events, which now and then were unfolded in our pathway; exotics quite out of their native setting, like an oil painting in a woodshed. Now, on that very night, Doctor Brown had pitched his big tent about a mile south of our camp. In the stillness of the evening, we heard issuing from it the sound of several voices in well rendered music. The familiar melodies were like a letter from home and in pleasing contrast with the yelping of prairie wolves, to which we had grown accustomed.

In the morning, when we moved out into line the Browns were in advance. The ladies sat upon their horses gracefully, as Kentucky girls usually do, using old-fashioned side saddles. The cow-girl saddle even in the West appears then not yet

to have come into use. Fred addressed the young ladies, expressing appreciation of the music we heard on the preceding evening. They did not seem to have suspected that their voices would be heard at so great a distance. One of the boys, who rarely attempted to produce any music (except now and then a rollicking negro melody), spoke to the young ladies in unqualified praise of the music sometimes discoursed in our camp, whereupon the Doctor at once invited us to come over that evening and bring any noise-producing instruments that we might boast. With some proper if not necessary apology for the undeserved compliment from our companion, we accepted the invitation, stating that we should come, not indeed in hope of contributing anything of value to the music, but in the pleasant expectation of meeting Mrs. Brown and also of gaining more knowledge from the Doctor, who appeared to be a man from whom we might learn very much, as he seemed to be well informed in botany and geology. Incidentally (!) we hoped to meet the young ladies again.

The regular evening chores having been performed, the boys proceeded to shave, and otherwise to prepare for the evening call. The bottom of their "pants" remained tucked in their long-topped boots, but shoeblacking was a luxury not to be obtained. Flannel shirts without coats and waistcoats were regarded as *costume de rigueur* for the place and occasion. Thus attired we sauntered over to the Browns just as the sun was sinking in the west. The young ladies had put some fresh ribbons in their hair,

and were attractively dressed for such an *al fresco* gathering. The wagon seat was placed upon the ground and along with some boxes and a couple of camp chairs served us admirably. The preparations for the evening entertainment have been described in such detail solely that the events of the coming night may be better understood.

We returned to our camp at a seasonable hour. The air of the early evening had been unusually soft and still. Fred having already pitched his little tent, had turned into it with Ben for sleep, while I sought an eligible spot on the open ground, and rolled up in my blankets. Not long after midnight Paul, who was on guard, was startled by a vivid flash of lightning in the southwest. The sleepers were aroused, and peering out from their blankets saw signs of an approaching storm, for the fleecy clouds, which often presage the coming tempest were rolling in a threatening manner. It was thought prudent at once to drive the stakes of the tent more firmly, and tie down the wagon covers; this done we watched the rising clouds. We did not wait long, for hardly ten minutes had passed when the squall suddenly burst upon us with great fury, accompanied with a deluge of driving rain. The wagon covers creaked, and in two or three minutes the little tent was lifted and overturned. The horses picketed near-by were seen to run hither and thither in alarm, and some of them broke away. In the midst of the severest gust, a woman's voice in a tone indicating great alarm, came from the direction of the Doctor's camp.

"They are in trouble over at the Browns," said one.

"And why not?" was the reply, as the tempest shrieked and the driving rain poured upon us. We could now do no good service where we were and therefore started rapidly in the direction of the Browns' tent, shouting, so as to be heard above the roar of the storm, that we were coming. Sure enough the family had been sleeping in their large wall tent, and the squall had lifted it into the air, leaving it flapping in the wind and held by one tent pin.

Everything that had been within it was drenched with rain. The Browns were soaked and we were soaked, but what was worse, the gale had carried away upon its wings many light articles likely to be much needed in the morning. They had not arranged their wagons for sleeping, as we had arranged ours, having relied upon their tents for such purposes. There they stood helpless in the driving storm, each of the ladies wrapped in such blanket or covering as she happened to snatch when the tent was lifted from over their heads.

Each flash of lightning revealed for an instant the pitiable condition in which they were left. But they had doubtless passed through even greater trials than this in their exile from their old Kentucky home during the Civil War. When satisfied that the worst had passed, they forced a laugh in contemplating their ridiculous situation, and proposed to climb into their wagon and await the dawn. Mrs. Brown suggested that possibly they had a few dry articles there, but in the saturated condition in which they all were, with the water running down their wrappings,

they would deluge everything in the wagon. We then informed the Doctor that Uncle Simeon Cobb, one of our party whom he had already seen, and a fine old gentleman, on a slight cessation of the storm would cheerfully migrate to another wagon from his own, an arrangement that would afford all the ladies fair protection until morning. The Doctor, remarking that this reminded him of some phases of his life in the Confederate Army, gratefully accepted the offer. He decided to go with us, and then return to watch out the night and protect the family effects as best he could. The storm had nearly passed when the little party slowly made its way over the wet plain through the darkness to the Deacon's wagon, where Uncle Simeon was safe and dry in his double-covered prairie schooner. He had heard the crashing of the thunder and the shrieking of the gale, and readily comprehended the situation on a brief explanation. His matches and lantern enabled him to light his apartment; and in the course of time he donned his waterproof, and came forth amid the ladies' expressions of deepest regret that they had been compelled to disturb his comfort. But they were thankful for a harbor of refuge.

It was a great involuntary shower bath they had taken. One end of the Deacon's wagon was wet in the morning. When the day began to dawn, the sky was clear and bright. The Doctor then made many trips between the two camps. The dry clothes of the ladies which he excavated from the trunks in their wagon were transported in chunks, here a little and there a little, but in his

clumsiness and ignorance of woman's requirements he seemed unable to produce the right articles. There were too many of one kind of garment or too few of another to clothe his family fully, in the conventional manner. As he tucked a tight bundle of white or colored goods under the Deacon's wagon cover, after but a moment of delay there came back through the canvas many sounds of distress indicating the conviction that everything in the trunks was topsy-turvy and that garments were strung along his entire pathway. It was fully two hours before a full complement of apparel had been transported the half mile between the camps, so that the feminine members of the Brown family were able to emerge from under the wagon cover. Scattered around in the wagon there remained for future rescue many mysterious garments, diaphanous or bifurcated, all entirely out of place in the Deacon's apartment, but possibly of some use in the future society life in Denver. When the sun had dried the surface of the ground, these and some others found elsewhere were collected, and the girls now arrayed in town clothes, having filed back to their camp soon appeared to be taking an inventory of what are conveniently termed dry-goods but which were now very wet. In the meantime the boys, jumping upon horses, rode in the direction taken by the storm; and here and there, caught upon stunted grubs or bushes, were found various articles. One of the straw hats had been carried fully two miles. During the forenoon both camps had the appearance of laundry establishments, a multitude of garments being spread out to dry in the sun.

CHAPTER VIII
Jack Morrow's Ranch

ON a following night we camped on what for the lack of a better word I would term the shore of the so-called Plum Creek. There was naught in it of what is generally regarded as the chief characteristic of a creek, to-wit, water; but it had one feature that is proper for a creek, and that was a gully, which we regarded as unnecessarily deep, but which was absolutely dry. I was informed, no plums have ever been known to grow on its treeless margins. I remember, indeed, having read in later Nebraska agricultural reports that twenty varieties of wild plums are native to the territory, but that they are so similar one to another that none but an expert can distinguish or classify them. They may grow on the river islands, though I observed none on our course.

Near the waterless creek was a newly built stage station, known also as Plum Creek. The station formerly on its site had been destroyed by the Indians, one in each of the two preceding years. Such was the history of nearly all the stations along the Platte.

A few miles west of Plum Creek, we became satisfied that somewhere along there we should cross the one-hundredth meridian, which had figured prominently in the literature of

the day as approximately defining the border of the American desert, beyond which undefined line there was no hope for the agriculturist. Fremont had described the country as "a vast, arid desert, impregnated with salts and alkali."

Mr. Holton, in an address before the Scientific Club in Topeka, as late as the year 1880, is reported to have said that, "Commencing at the Rocky Mountains and extending eastward toward the Missouri, and from the Gulf of Mexico to the Northwestern part of the United States, lay the great American desert of thirty years ago," and, he added, "the geographies of that day were right."

As I rode from day to day far back upon the uplands, I, too became convinced that they were right.

> "The stinging grass, the thorny plants,
> And other prickly tropic glories,
> The thieving, starved inhabitants
> Who look so picturesque in stories,"

about constitute the impression received by one observer

Somewhere along this belt we certainly passed by slow gradation into a still more arid country having an exceedingly scant vegetation, in which the stubby, spiny, prickly types were prominent. The buffalo grass, having a short, rounded blade resembling the needles of a pine tree, and which cured like hay in the dry air, was very nutritious for the stock, but even where it grew, its small brown bunches covered but little of the soil.

I have observed, and it is generally conceded, that the eastern prairie grass has of late each year spread westward, because "rain follows the plow."

Across that seemingly forbidding expanse, tens of thousands of Mormon emigrants had passed, to reach another desert equally inhospitable, where the "soil was impregnated with salts and alkali." Hundreds of trains had transported the families of gold hunters to California and the Pike's Peak region, and now we were watching the tide of migration still press westward along this trail, but as far as I could discern, not one person of all these voyagers had deigned to pause and leave his impress upon this land. Their pathway was marked only by the bleaching bones of horses and oxen that had perished in thousands by the wayside; and these bones were nearly all that those travelers left behind. This slumbering, inert expanse must slumber on, until some one shall find and develop its springs of life.

On the evening of June 22nd, our national flag was seen in the west, streaming out from the staff at Fort McPherson, a post named in memory of our general who fell in front of Atlanta. The station was known also as Cottonwood. As we passed on to where we camped beyond it, we observed three small buildings made of cedar logs, also a quartermaster's building, and a small barracks of the same material. Three adobe barns were in the rear. In one of the buildings was the sutler's store, an institution that was always present at every post, where supplies both wet and dry were obtainable. The agreeable fragrance of cedar induced

us, at a considerable sacrifice of money, to purchase a small log to carry with us for fuel, as we had become weary of being scavengers of refuse material for our fires. On investigation we learned that two companies of U. S. Volunteers, and two companies of U. S. Cavalry, were then stationed at the post, for protection against the Indians.

At night the mosquitoes proved themselves to be the most ferocious and blood-thirsty creatures we had as yet encountered. Hoping to secure some immunity from their attacks, a few of us decided to sleep in the tent and in it start a dense smudge produced by some coarse, semi-combustible material, on the generally accepted theory that those insects could be driven out by smoke. While this process was going on, we sat outside on the smoky side of the camp, hoping there to obtain some relief. As additional protection, the smokers lighted their pipes and cigars in the confident belief that their troubles were over for a time; but when we counted five large, long-legged mosquitoes perched serenely upon a single lighted cigar, in addition to the uncounted insects encamped on the face of the smoker, we concluded that the smoke habit was not offensive to those impertinent marauding pests. On lying down in our tent we were suffocated with the smoke, the only chance for respiration being to put our noses out from under the canvas, where they became instant centers of attack from fresh invaders. There was little sleep to be had that night, and we determined that, in the future, we should camp on higher lands back from the river, whenever it

was practicable.

At this post, as at Kearney, a reorganization of trains had to be made. As illustrating the average composition of these trains, from the records made at the post, we found that there preceded us in one day, three trains equipped as follows:

Captain J. S. Miller, 42 men, 3 women, 7 children, 33 oxen, 25 revolvers, 15 guns. Destination, Denver.

Captain Harmon Kish, 30 men, 20 ox wagons, 8 guns, 23 revolvers. Destination, Denver.

Captain S. M. Scott, 34 men, 32 wagons, 34 revolvers, 20 guns. Destination, Salt Lake City.

This number of trains in one day was doubtless above the average.

As the result of a conference, Dr. Brown with his family had dropped behind us with another train that would afford better protection. Having been assigned to the convoy of a large outfit, we moved out with it on the following day, but quickly separated from it and camped twelve miles distant in the bluffs beyond and overlooking the ranch of the redoubtable Jack Morrow, concerning whom we had heard many remarkable tales. He had been reported as an occasional visitor to the river towns, which he painted a vivid red after he had taken sufficient booze to bedim his usually clear judgment. We had been informed in Nebraska City that when on his recreation visits to the river towns he frequently indulged in the pastime of lighting his cigar with a bank note, – and no one dared to interfere! If his history were

truly written it would be made up largely of thrills.

All except Pete and the Deacon went down to the ranch rather early, to spend the evening with Jack and his associates. The establishment was the most extensive that we saw on all our travels, and consisted in part of a large, two-story building, well constructed of logs. Entering the large room, which was the business part of the ranch, we observed that it was well stocked with staple goods adapted to the requirements of emigrants and for barter with the Indians. A few saddles were suspended by their stirrups from pegs driven in the logs that formed the side walls of the apartment. Behind a solid rough counter were barrels of sugar and other groceries. On the shelves were articles of clothing of coarse material, also piles of moccasins, and upon the floor a pile of furs, doubtless received in trade with the Indians.

The heavy log beams that supported the low second floor were exposed, and from over the counter and near the side of the room there hung from the beams a multitude of articles, all for sale or exchange. Half a dozen men were lounging in the room, and one of Morrow's assistants was sitting upon the wide lower shelf with his feet upon the counter. As no traders were in the store, there was a free and easy "nothing doing" atmosphere pervading the establishment.

Soon after our arrival, Jack entered the room from a side door. On his first appearance he impressed us with the conviction that he was a man of more than ordinary power; and the effect of his entry upon all who were in the room indicated that he was

a leader of men. His striking personality would attract attention in any company. His nose, which was strongly prominent, was decidedly aquiline; his eyes were small and bright; and a face is rarely seen that would so quickly suggest that of an eagle. Comporting perfectly with the quick and penetrating glance of his eyes, his athletic frame seemed to be closely knit; he was vigorous and alert. He wore a negligee shirt, a soft hat and, strapped to his waist, a brace of revolvers. He observed us immediately on entering the room, and coming at once to where we were standing in a group he entered into conversation, freely answering our many questions. Later in the evening, after having been called away for a time, he returned, and having asked us to be seated he was led to relate many interesting incidents connected with his western life.

During Jack's absence, Dan and I took a seat in another part of the room beside a man who had recently entered, and who, I learned, was an *attache* of the ranch. In the course of conversation, he described in these words a recent event which had occurred on the ranch.

"One afternoon a few weeks ago, while Jack and I were here alone, a band of hot-headed Sioux crowded into the ranch here to clean it out, as they have done at some time with almost every ranch on the Platte. I reckon they had got too much whiskey somewhere. Anyhow, you see there's lots of things in the store, and they wanted to get what they could before they burned the building. Jack saw just what was coming, and backed up against

that wall over there, and I went and stood with him, and he was as cool as a cucumber. I was just waiting to see what he would do, for we had our guns all right.

"Their chief and two of the older Indians who knew Jack better than the young bucks did, were up pretty close to us. The chief told the bucks to let the stuff alone. One of them said he had sworn by his fathers that he would take anything he wanted. I understood what he said, you know, and then the redskins began to load up with stuff. At this, the chief in a flash drew his bow to the arrow's head and quicker than lightning the arrow point was stuck deep into the Indian's side, and he dropped on the floor in a chunk. The chief said to the young bucks, 'Take him away, for have I not said it?' They took the body out and Jack hasn't been troubled any more. But if their chief hadn't stopped the business just then, there would have been carcasses for more than one Indian funeral, for both Jack and me had a gun in each hand when we were backed against that wall. You know, when they come in such crowds they scare lots of these fellows, but they can't scare Jack if he has any sort of a chance, and he is a great shot and never gets rattled. He's always ready for a fight, and he has had lots of 'em."

We were informed by one of the loungers in the ranch that Jack was living with two Indian wives who were then in the building. This statement was confirmed by freighters whom we saw later. His brother, who had an Indian wife, was associated with him in business. We were not disposed to question the

rancher concerning so trifling a matter as that of his domestic relations. It would be thoroughly consistent for so eminent an Indian-American diplomat to adopt the most advanced customs of the distinguished heads of the tribes with whom he usually preserved pleasant relations (for Jack, being familiar with the language of some of the tribes, had served the Government as an interpreter in Indian treaties). Polygamy was common among the chiefs of many western tribes. Both Parkman and Catlin cite numerous cases of plurality of wives which came under their observation among the Indians. They also mention instances in which wives were sold, the almost universal price being a horse, a highly cherished possession among the savages. The stealing of wives is also mentioned in old writings concerning the tribes. A trapper stated to us that any Indian might steal a squaw, and if he chose afterwards to make an adequate present to her rightful proprietor, then the easy husband, to quote the language exactly, "for the most part fell asleep." Parkman refers to Mahto Tatonka who, out of several dozen squaws whom he had stolen, could boast that he had never paid for one, but snapping his fingers in the face of the injured husband had defied the extremity of his indignation; and no one had dared to lay the finger of violence upon him. Men of the West say that an arrow shot from a ravine, or a stab in the dark, an act which demands no great valor, and is especially suited to the Indian genius, has often proved the sequel to the stealing of a squaw. The theft of a horse, I really believe, is regarded as a graver offense.

It was my good fortune to learn from Jack Morrow some facts concerning my former friend and schoolmate, Billy Comstock. Comstock, well-known on the plains as "Buffalo Bill," was descended from excellent stock. He was born in Comstock, Michigan, a town that was named in honor of his father. As a boy I remember him as being almost as dark in complexion as an Indian, and with hair as black as a raven. He was slender, but firmly built, and was a successful sprinter, having great endurance. His temperament well-fitted him for a roving life, and when but a youth he was on the plains. He was on the mount of the first pony express to Pike's Peak, which started on April 4, 1859, and shared the thrilling experiences of the daring young men who on their flying steeds transported the mails through the Indian country. They exchanged their horses at frequent intervals, usually vaulting from one saddle to that of a fresh horse held in waiting. As he had become familiar with the Indian dialects, Comstock's services as interpreter were frequently secured by the Government. He had his headquarters at Jack Morrow's ranch a considerable part of the time during the years 1864 and 1865.

Two years after our visit to Jack Morrow, (to be more exact, in the year 1868), Comstock was reported to have been killed by the Indians about fifty miles northeast of Sheridan, Kansas. Later information indicated that he was killed by Sharp Grover, a noted scout. Grover was in turn killed in a row at Pond City, near Fort Wallace. These facts were confirmed in a later interview

with William F. Cody. Cody, who was a close personal friend of Comstock, but somewhat younger, was also a frequent guest at the Jack Morrow ranch. The two were among the distinguished characters on the plains.

Cody received his *sobriquet* "Buffalo Bill" as the result of a contest with Billy Comstock. It happened that a short time prior to the death of the latter, while the work on the Pacific Railroad was being pushed in Kansas, the superintendent of construction was dependent largely on the buffalo for meat for the workmen. Some of the hunters failed to furnish the required quantity. This condition resulted in putting these two famous men into competition. The number killed by each in the time agreed has been given to the writer by one of the contestants. Suffice it to state that William F. Cody secured the championship, wresting the title from Comstock, and has since been known as Buffalo Bill. Cody has been the guide for princes and presidents on hunting and other expeditions through the far West, and with his Wild West Show, so well known throughout America, he has appeared before the crowned heads of many European countries. Not long ago the writer discovered him in Rome, where Cody introduced the Italian King and a royal party to the types of western life which he succeeded so well in presenting.

Cody was born in Scott County, Iowa, in 1845. He was started on his public career by Colonel Judson, better known as Ned Buntline, a writer of sensational stories. One of Ned Buntline's stories has been dramatized under the title of "Buffalo Bill, the

King of Border Men."

While at the Junction house we learned from Morrow that a large band of Sioux was reported to have come down recently from the North to a point on the river twenty-seven miles farther West; and from information received concerning their conduct Jack was of the opinion that trouble was brewing. Returning to our camp we quickly secured our blankets and slept upon the open ground. The air was so dry, clear, and exhilarating that even Fred's little tent was not pitched. At about midnight Pete, who was on guard, quietly crept to where Paul and I were sleeping, and gently arousing us, whispered that he had discovered figures moving round in the shadows, and at one time saw them distinctly as they passed over the hill. It was at once decided that we should quietly inform our men, and then ascertain who were the interlopers. Pete had been unable by the faint light of the stars to determine whether they were Indians or whites.

The stealing of stock was a common pursuit of many men of both races, and the fact that these intruders were lurking in the valley led us to conclude that the visitors were thieves. We silently separated, and by prearrangement secured our rifles; in twos we noiselessly circled the valley, and like a net gradually closed in to the center.

Two skulking men were evidently surprised when an equal number of our party confronted them and shouted a signal to the other boys to close in. The intruders were thus corralled almost before they were aware that they were discovered.

"What the devil are you after, creeping around our camp at this time of night?" said Pete sternly to the strangers, and at the same time he snapped the cock of his gun. With a stammering voice one replied that they were hunting for stock. "Whose stock are you hunting?" was asked with considerable vehemence. The stragglers both swore that they had lost some stock which they were trying to find. Our boys had closed in upon the captives, who, doubtless knowing the unwritten law of the plains, became manifestly uncomfortable.

They protested so fervently and made so many contradictory statements that we were convinced of their guilty intentions. Dan, with vigorous tones, informed them that if they believed that any stock which they might have missed had become mixed with our horses, they should not unnecessarily hazard their lives by endeavoring to secure their property by stealth at midnight, because stragglers, who should invade and lurk around an isolated camp in that country at that hour were liable to be shot at sight, as a precautionary measure. In the general clamor there were other similar arguments presented. We finally conducted the suspects to our camp for further examination, where by the light of a lantern we found them to be well armed. Their guns were temporarily placed in Paul's custody. The flickering glare of the lamps also revealed their features and dress, and if they were not thieves they certainly had all the prevailing symptoms.

It devolved upon us to hold a council and pass upon the prisoners. Our form of procedure was not restricted by any

established code. The burden of evidence seemed to be so overwhelming against the accused that the majority promptly decided in favor of the usual punishment for western horse thieves. Deacon Cobb, however, argued for a commutation of the sentence: he urged that the suspects should report forthwith at Jack Morrow's ranch, should rouse him from his slumbers, and return with his certificate of their good character. They were reinvested with their guns, having assured us that they would conform to the terms, and on Pete's report that none of our horses were missing, were allowed to start on their mission; as was expected they were seen by us no more.

At day-break on the following morning while our breakfast was being prepared, Dan and I were on a bluff watching the glorious sunrise. Before us was the junction of the North and South branches of the Platte River. The course of those streams could be followed far to the west, and the main channel, which we had been following, was glistening in the east. Near the junction, and far below us, was Jack's ranch, visited the previous night, and also known as the Junction House, – but Jack had a wider reputation than the forks of the Platte.

We observed that the river valley had gradually narrowed and that the bluffs were nearer to the stream than they were further east. As we were surveying the beautiful scenery, we were suddenly startled by the music of a brass band coming from behind a spur of the bluffs in the west. The booming of cannon could not have been a greater surprise to us. Changing

our position to another spur in the hills, we discovered a regiment of cavalry, which we learned later was the 11th Ohio. It was preceded by a long mule train transporting baggage and some invalids. This was followed by the mounted officers, who immediately preceded the band wagon. The cavalry moved along further behind with little regard for order. In the rear were about fifty Indians mounted on horses, riding rapidly back and forth, as if to give an exhibition of their superior horsemanship.

Possibly, like children they were attracted by curiosity; more probably, however, as we concluded later, they were following to create the impression that all was serene with the Indians; and they were undoubtedly pleased to see the troops moving eastward from their country, and desired to report their progress to their chiefs, whose lodges were not far away in the northwest. We learned that the cavalry was on its way home, to be discharged. The band was playing for the special entertainment of Jack Morrow, and continued from time to time until it reached his ranch. Jack would be sure to open something attractive for the entertainment of the whole party. Before the troops or the Indians left Jack's ranch we were again on the trail, rolling westward.

CHAPTER IX
Men of the Western Twilight

JACK MORROW'S ranch was left far behind us before the sun appeared above the hills, for we had made an early start, as had been our recent practice, so that we might rest during the heat of the early afternoon. On the following morning we were on O'Fallon's bluff, so named in memory of Benjamin O'Fallon, of St. Louis, who was killed there by Indians. Topographical surveys give the elevation of the valley below the bluffs as 3,012 feet above sea level, or about 2,000 feet above Omaha. These surveys also show the bed of the Platte River to average about 300 feet higher than the Republican River at the South, and parallel streams at the North, at the various points in the same longitude West. O'Fallon's bluff, however, is not a commanding eminence, but seems to be nothing more than a good-sized, irregularly shaped sand dune.

As we were dragging along the sandy road we observed approaching us four somewhat excited men, who with a two-mule team, were hastening eastward. Three of them, two of whom were bareheaded, were walking up the grade as rapidly as possible, while the driver on the wagon, although urging his mules forward, seemed unable to press them into a gait faster than a walk, because of the heavy road and the ascending

grade. When they halted at our side, the mules and the walkers were wet with perspiration. We also stopped, and leaving our horses, gathered round the strangers, as it was evident that they had something to communicate. As soon as they had recovered enough breath after their arduous climb to talk coherently, one of them, to quote his own words, informed us that the Indians were raising the devil up the river only a few miles away, and that some of the savages were moving eastward. Another ejaculated that seven hundred Ogallala Sioux had camped on an island near Baker's ranch, and that the ranch was invaded and would probably be destroyed. They urged us to turn back until we could get a strong escort. Each had some item of information and word of counsel.

Having obtained all possible particulars concerning the situation, we found ourselves very much in the frame of mind of the average small boy, who, learning that a fight is on around the corner, is disposed to rush immediately to the center of disturbance. We had no definite knowledge concerning the whereabouts of other trains moving westward, with one of which, according to Government orders, we ought perhaps to have been traveling. There certainly was no wagon in sight between us and the place where the white sandy trail curved up the slopes of the bluffs beyond and was lost to sight some miles westward.

We threshed out the matter thoroughly in the presence of our new friends, and all members of our party were more and more inclined to press forward as rapidly as possible, fearing we might

fail to witness something that might be of interest; and all this directly against valuable advice given in the Book of Proverbs. When we thanked the gentlemen and bade them good-bye, they wished us good luck and a safe trip, and as a final admonition urged us to be on our guard.

Passing over the western extremity of the bluffs, where the trail begins to descend again into the Platte valley, our train came into view of the little house well known as Baker's ranch. Beyond it flowed the muddy Platte, the channel of which could be traced many miles of its course. It then appeared to the eye as if divided into many channels, which formed numerous islands or sand bars. Many of these islands in the Platte are almost as unstable as the ancient Delos, or as the waters that sweep over them in flood time, appearing in one place today, in another tomorrow, because the quicksands are always rolling and shifting under the action of the swift current. On the other hand, the clayey formation in the valley of the lower Platte, termed loess by geologists, seems throughout that course of the river to assume a crystalline form; and as the stream washes away its shores, it carves out many perpendicular banks having the columnar form of basaltic cliffs, but of a neutral red color.

As from the hills we looked with our field glass to a point beyond the ranch, we observed, and perhaps for the first time along the river, a bank that was low and easily fordable, for we saw two mounted Indians rapidly enter the stream and ride through it to a large island, which like an oasis in the desert was

well covered with verdure. Upon the island was an Indian village; and beyond the island, and beyond the further channel of the sparkling river, the brown plain gradually sloped upward to the table-lands at the North.

Clustered rather closely together upon the island, and standing out clearly in the bright sunlight, were seventy white circular lodges, each tapering gracefully to a point, and appearing from far away like a crest of fringe; at the top of each lodge, were the lodge poles, with their small ends crossed at the apex. Around and among the tents, was a scene of animation in which warriors, squaws, and children confusedly intermingled like a legion of busy red ants in a city of ant hills, each forming a moving dot of bright color. All this striking and beautiful scene, as more clearly discerned through the field glass, resembled rather a motion picture than a scene in real life, for not a sound reached us through the still air from that cluster of Indian tepees. As the Sioux lodges average about ten occupants each, it appeared safe to estimate the population of the village at about 700. They were men of the western twilight, as fantastically named by Karl G. Carus.

Having surveyed rather carefully the general landscape, our party proceeded observantly until we lined up in front of Baker's ranch. We, who were on horseback, alighted, and passing unmolested by a dozen athletic red warriors, we entered the open door. To our surprise we found the floor nearly covered with Indians reclining in various postures. Stepping over two or three

of these recumbent forms, an act that did not make them move a hair's breadth, we picked our way toward the corner of the room, where we met the valiant Lew Baker, then in the prime of his young manhood. The counter extended along the east side of the building, after the fashion of many country stores, and behind it stood its owner.

A little woman, the wife of Baker, was also seated behind the same counter near a window at the front of the room, somewhat protected and concealed by a desk upon that end of the counter, and was therefore not readily observed by persons entering. In her arms was their only child, Elma, then four months old. Baker introduced us to his wife, with whom I exchanged a few words. Johnny Baker, the famous crack shot and for many years a star feature as sharpshooter in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, was a later scion of this stock. While careful not to betray any interest concerning the red visitors in the ranch, we embraced the first opportunity to obtain from Baker all information possible regarding the situation. We asked if he believed that any of the Indians present would understand our conversation. He gave it as his opinion that they would not, though as we all well understand, our manner and tone of voice might suggest much to them.

Baker, continuing, and turning his eyes toward the ceiling as if conversing on some general topic, said, "Those Indians you see lying around you on the floor, entered the room this morning almost at the break of day, taking very nearly their present positions on the floor, and not one of them since their

arrival seems to have spoken a word; they have scarcely moved." Nor had there been any expressions upon any one of their faces, except the same unchanged sullenness that we could then observe. During our interview neither one of us appeared to notice the subjects of our conversation.

As is well known, there is a certain peculiar strain clearly marked in the character of most Indians of the warlike tribes. If they become offended, it is not their practice to remove their outer garments if they should happen to be wearing a blanket, and like an impetuous Irishman, at once rush to the front with clenched fists, or like a volatile Frenchman, pour out a volley of sacres, to indicate their self confidence, nor are apologies considered an adequate satisfaction for any injury. They are not loquacious at any time. They are more disposed to nourish their wrath in silence and like a sulky child refuse to communicate with their enemy, until the opportunity comes when they may strike an unexpected blow under conditions favorable to themselves. The Sioux, indeed, at the time of which we are writing, had ample grounds for resentment, and although the ranch-man was powerless to right their wrongs, they regarded all whites as common parties to the controversy yet unsettled. Baker well understood their temper, but did not know when the storm might burst. He had placed his little wife and child where he could best shield them, relying chiefly upon himself for protection; his quick eye was ready at all times to detect the faintest hostile movement; and he declared himself determined

to defend his little wife and baby to the utmost.

It was a remarkable feature of the demonstration that occurred while we were in Baker's ranch, that at intervals of but a few minutes one Indian after another, usually in pairs, silently entered the opened door, and with a soft, noiseless tread of moccasined feet, moved across the room, among or across the impassive warriors, who lay stretched out upon the floor apparently unnoticed, with whom as far as we could discern they exchanged no word or sign whatever. On reaching Baker, some offered a trifling article in exchange for others of much greater value, preferably for a side of bacon or a bag of flour, which were taken without comment, and the articles so taken were at once carried away. In some cases an Indian would actually take possession of a coveted article without any payment in return, and at once leave the building with the property; but during all this time the Red Men on the floor lay in silence, utterly indifferent to all that was taking place.

We offered Mr. Baker any assistance that our small party could afford, and urged him in any event to abandon his ranch and seek safety for himself and family with some armed train. He finally replied that he would endeavor to hold the situation until some outfit should arrive, bound eastward, but such trains were now far apart. In the meantime, his stock of merchandise was being rapidly depleted. Although his ranch for that day was spared by the band which was then investing it, it was twice attacked and destroyed by the Indians within the ensuing eighteen

months, the particulars of which attacks were furnished me by Johnny Baker as matters of family history, although he himself was too young then to have personal recollections of the stirring events.

As we could be of little service to the beleaguered young rancher and his little family, for which we felt great solicitude, and as he would not go westward at that time, we pushed onward a mile beyond, to a point near the river bank, for our luncheon. Instead of picketing our horses in the usual manner, we tied them to the wagon wheels and compelled them to forego their noon grazing until we could get our bearings. While the meal was being prepared, three of the boys, Ben and Fred being two of the number, had the temerity to ford the river and visit the Indian village. What the purpose of such a proceeding might have been cannot now be imagined. Curiosity certainly got the better of good sense. Ben was usually to be relied upon as sane and sensible.

It proved easy for them to ford the comparatively shallow but rather wide channel of the river flowing between the mainland and the island where the Indian lodges were rather closely grouped together. The Indians evidently had selected this island for their temporary abode, on account of the grass with which portions of it were covered, the mainland being very dry and furnishing but little forage for stock.

Our estimate of the number of their horses and ponies was about 600. These were wandering about on the island, many

standing in the water's edge, switching the flies with their tails. The lodges, as was the custom of the plains at that time, were made of dressed buffalo skins, which in the distance looked comparatively white. They were well made and the skins were firmly sewed together. On a closer approach the color was seen to be slightly tawny.

The larger tents were about twenty-five feet in height, generally with thirty poles supporting each tent. We had been informed that nearly all their lodge poles were obtained from near the foot of the Rocky Mountains, and plainsmen stated, on the authority of the Indians, that many of them have thus been in use for a hundred years. One, and perhaps two, of the large tents would have afforded space for forty persons to dine in its shelter.

Around the lodges were scores of squaws, many of them at that hour half reclining in the doors of their tents, in costumes generally quite decollete. One young girl was observed whose apparel indicated that she was connected with a family of distinction. She wore a balmoral skirt of brilliant hues, which was possibly secured in some trade by her admiring father or lover. She was also loaded with beads and tinsel. Many papooses were decorated with beads and similar trifles. These cheap articles with brilliantly colored calico, were often received in exchange for furs and robes.

The Indian bucks were much in evidence when we first saw the village, although but few were there when we reached it. We concluded that many of them had gone out on some expedition

after we had obtained our first view of the village from O'Fallon's bluff. Our party hardly felt at ease, as there was a manifest lack of cordiality towards us among the inhabitants, which was not explained by our unfamiliarity with their language; our boys, therefore, were not obtrusive.

Having sauntered leisurely among the malodorous lodges for a time, we suddenly observed the rapid approach of a large body of mounted Indians from away beyond the North side of the river. They were coming with such headlong impetuosity that we instantly concluded that we might be greatly needed in our own camp. Accordingly we recrossed the river without unnecessary delay and were soon relating our experiences around the camp fire while we ate a hasty lunch. The meal had hardly been despatched when Noah, on casting his eyes in the direction of the river, immediately turned and exclaimed, "There's a band of those devils fording the stream, and I'll bet they are coming to return that visit."

Sure enough they were, and a social obligation is rarely discharged with greater alacrity and spontaneity. They were probably a portion of the band that first came in from the North, and learning of the call made at their home during their brief absence, they made an instantaneous rush across the stream, and immediately on touching dry land on our side, came on a dead run for our camp. On reaching it, their horses were brought to a sudden stop. At the same moment the Indians were on their feet upon the ground as quick as a flash, and almost simultaneously;

and, more quickly than it can be told, they were everywhere in our camp, and we seemed to be nowhere. They made themselves thoroughly at home.

As the result of a common impulse, we also quickly found ourselves within close speaking distance of each other. None of our party were able to state the exact number of the invaders, but twenty-five was a later estimate. They were young, vigorous warriors, all armed with bows, arrows, and knives; none of them, so far as we observed, bore firearms. Like all the Western and Northwestern Indians, except the Sacs, Foxes, and Pawnees, their hair was long and straight. They wore no articles of dress which had been adopted from the whites, but they presented themselves in the primitive simplicity of feathers and paint, limbs and breast being bare. One of them wore big feathers. He may have been the great Chief Hole-in-the-Ground, and we should have been pleased if he had stayed in the hole.

Possibly we did not greet them with a cordial welcome. There was certainly no need to extend them formally the freedom of the camp. As a matter of fact, this ceremony was forgotten, but it was never missed. We were also slightly embarrassed and perhaps uncommonly modest. The visitors came upon us unexpectedly, like a great family of distant relations by marriage. There was too little prepared food in our camp to furnish a collation that would comport with the dignity of the chief with the big feathers, and his minions. His highness, however, relieved us from any concern on that score, for without standing on ceremony he, and

his red-skinned satellites, proceeded at once to help themselves to everything within reach. This was accomplished with all desirable despatch. It was observed that four or five of the number had thoughtfully provided themselves with blankets. As the day was very warm, this was not done for protection against the weather, but, as we discovered in a few moments, with the subtler purpose of using them as vehicles for plunder, – satchels and suit-cases having not yet become popular.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.