

ABBOTT JOHN CABOT

CHRISTOPHER CARSON,
FAMILIARLY KNOWN AS
KIT CARSON

John Abbott

**Christopher Carson, Familiarly
Known as Kit Carson**

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PREFACE

It is a prominent object of this volume to bring to light the wild adventures of the pioneers of this continent, in the solitudes of the mountains, the prairies and the forests; often amidst hostile Indians, and far away from the restraints and protection of civilization. This strange, weird-like life is rapidly passing away, before the progress of population, railroads and steamboats. But it is desirable that the memory of it should not drift into oblivion. I think that almost every reader of this narrative will be somewhat surprised, in its development of the character of Christopher Carson. With energy and fearlessness never surpassed, he was certainly one of the most gentle, upright, and lovable of men. It is strange that the wilderness could have formed so estimable a character. America will not permit the virtues of so illustrious a son to be forgotten.

JOHN S.C. ABBOTT.

CHAPTER I.

Early Training

Birth of Christopher Carson.—Perils of the Wilderness.—Necessary Cautions.—Romance of the Forest.—The Far West.—The Encampment.—The Cabin and the Fort.—Kit an Apprentice.—The Alarm.—Destruction of a Trading Band.—The Battle and the Flight.—Sufferings of the Fugitives.—Dreadful Fate of Mr. Schenck.—Features of the Western Wilderness.—The March.

Christopher Carson, whose renown as Kit Carson has reached almost every ear in the country, was born in Madison county, Kentucky, on the 24th of December, 1809. Large portions of Kentucky then consisted of an almost pathless wilderness, with magnificent forests, free from underbrush, alive with game, and with luxuriant meadows along the river banks, inviting the settler's cabin and the plough.

There were then many Indians traversing those wilds. The fearless emigrants, who ventured to rear their huts in such solitudes, found it necessary ever to be prepared for an attack.

But very little reliance could be placed even in the friendly protestations of the vagabond savages, ever prowling about, and almost as devoid of intelligence or conscience, as the wolves which at midnight were heard howling around the settler's door. The family of Mr. Carson occupied a log cabin, which was bullet-proof, with portholes through which their rifles could command every approach. Women and children were alike taught the use of the rifle, that in case of an attack by any blood-thirsty gang, the whole family might resolve itself into a military garrison. Not a tree or stump was left, within musket shot of the house, behind which an Indian could secrete himself.

Almost of necessity, under these circumstances, any bright, active boy would become a skilful marksman. A small garden was cultivated where corn, beans and a few other vegetables were raised, but the main subsistence of the family consisted of the game with which forest, meadow and lake were stored. The settler usually reared his cabin upon the banks of some stream alive with fishes. There were no schools to take up the time of the boys; no books to read. Wild geese, ducks and other water fowl, sported upon the bosom of the river or the lake, whose waters no paddle wheel or even keel disturbed. Wild turkeys, quails, and pigeons at times, swept the air like clouds. And then there was the intense excitement of occasionally bringing down a deer, and even of shooting a ferocious grizzly bear or wolf or catamount. The romance of the sea creates a Robinson Crusoe. The still greater romance of the forest creates a Kit Carson. It often makes even an old man's blood thrill in his veins, to contemplate the wild and wondrous adventures, which this majestic continent opened to the pioneers of half a century ago.

Gradually, in Kentucky, the Indians disappeared, either dying off, or pursuing their game in the unexplored realms nearer the setting sun. Emigrants, from the East, in large numbers entered the State. Game, both in forest and meadow, became scarce; and the father of Kit Carson, finding settlers crowding him, actually rearing their huts within two or three miles of his cabin, abandoned his home to find more room in the still more distant West.

Christopher was then the youngest child, a babe but one year old. The wilderness, west of them, was almost unexplored. But Mr. Carson, at his blazing fireside, had heard from the Indians, and occasionally from some adventurous white hunter, glowing accounts of the magnificent prairies, rivers, lakes and forests of the far West, reposing in the solitude and the silence which had reigned there since the dawn of the creation.

There were no roads through the wilderness. The guide of the emigrants was the setting sun. Occasionally they could take advantage of some Indian trail, trodden hard by the moccasined feet of the savages, in single file, through countless generations. Through such a country, the father of Kit Carson commenced a journey of several hundred miles, with his wife and three or four children, Kit

being an infant in arms. Unfortunately we are not informed of any of the particulars of this journey. But we know, from numerous other cases, what was its general character.

It must have occupied two or three weeks. All the family went on foot, making about fifteen miles a day. They probably had two pack horses, laden with pots and kettles, and a few other essential household and farming utensils. Early in the afternoon Mr. Carson would begin to look about for a suitable place of encampment for the night. He would find, if possible, the picturesque banks of some running stream, where there was grass for his horses, and a forest growth to furnish him with wood for his cabin and for fire. If the weather were pleasant, with the prospect of a serene and cloudless night, a very slight protection would be reared, and the weary family, with a buffalo robe spread on the soft grass for a blanket, would sleep far more sweetly in the open air, than most millionaires sleep in tapestried halls and upon beds of down.

If clouds were gathering and menacing winds were wailing through the tree-tops, the vigorous arm of Mr. Carson, with his sharp axe, would, in an hour, rear a camp which could bid defiance to any ordinary storm. The roof would be so thatched, with bark and long grass, as to be quite impenetrable by the rain. Buffalo robes, and a few of the soft and fragrant branches of the hemlock tree, would create a couch which a prince might envy. Perhaps, as they came along, they had shot a turkey or a brace of ducks, or a deer, from whose fat haunches they have cut the tenderest venison. Any one could step out with his rifle and soon return with a supper.

While Mr. Carson, with his eldest son, was building the camp, the eldest girl would hold the baby, and Mrs. Carson would cook such a repast of dainty viands, as, when we consider the appetites, Delmonico never furnished. It was life in the "Adirondacks," with the additional advantage that those who were enjoying it, were inured to fatigue, and could have no sense of discomfort, from the absence of conveniences to which they were accustomed.

If in the darkness of midnight, the tempest rose and roared through the tree-tops, with crushing thunder, and floods of rain, the family was lulled to sounder sleep by these requiems of nature, or awoke to enjoy the sublimity of the scene, whose grandeur those in lowly life are often able fully to appreciate, though they may not have language with which to express their emotions.

The family crossed the Mississippi river, we know not how, perhaps in the birch canoe of some friendly Indian, perhaps on a raft, swimming the horses. They then continued their journey two hundred miles farther west, till they reached a spot far enough from neighbors and from civilization to suit the taste even of Mr. Carson. This was at the close of the year 1810. There was no State or even Territory of Missouri then. But seven years before, in 1803, France had ceded to the United States the vast unexplored regions, whose boundaries even, were scarcely defined, but which were then called Upper Louisiana.

Here Mr. Carson seems to have reached a very congenial home. He found, scattered through the wilderness, a few white people, trappers, hunters, wanderers who had preceded him. The Indians, in numerous bands, as hunters and as warriors, were roving these wilds. They could not be relied upon, whatever their friendly professions. Any wrong which they might receive from any individual white man, their peculiar code of morals told them they might rightly attempt to redress by wreaking their vengeance upon any pale face, however innocent he might be. Thus hundreds of Indian warriors might, at any time, come swooping down upon Mr. Carson's cabin, laying it in ashes, and burying their tomahawks in the brains of his family.

The few white men, some half a dozen in number, who had gathered around Mr. Carson, deemed it expedient for self-defence to unite and build a large log cabin, which should be to them both a house and a fort. This building of logs, quite long and but one story high, was pierced, at several points, with portholes, through which the muzzles of the rifles could be thrust. As an additional precaution they surrounded this house with palisades, consisting of sticks of timber, six or eight inches in diameter, and about ten feet high, planted as closely as possible together. These palisades were also pierced with portholes.

With a practiced eye, these men had selected a very beautiful spot for their habitation, in what is now called Howard county, Missouri, just north of the Missouri river. It seems that they had much to fear from the Indians. There were at this time, frequent wars with them, in the more eastern portions of the continent, and the rumors of these conflicts reached the ears of all the roving tribes, and greatly excited them. It became necessary for the settlers to go upon their hunting excursions with much caution.

As the months passed rapidly away, other persons one after another, came to their fort. They were glad to find a safe retreat there, and were welcomed as giving additional strength to the little garrison. Game began to be scarce around their lonely habitation, for the crack of the rifle was almost incessantly heard there. It thus became necessary to resort more generally to farming, especially to raising large fields of corn, whose golden ears could easily be converted into pork and into bread. With these two articles of food, cornbread and bacon, life could be hilarious on the frontier. Keeness of appetite supplied the want of all other delicacies.

When they went to the cornfield to work, they first made a careful exploration of the region around, to see if there were any lurking savages near. Then with their guns ever ready to be grasped, and keeping a close lookout for signs of danger, they ploughed and sowed and gathered in their harvest.

Thus fifteen years passed away. Civilization made gradual encroachments. Quite a little cluster of log huts was reared in the vicinity, where the inmates in case of necessity could flee to the fort for protection. Christopher, at fifteen years of age, was an unlettered boy, small in stature, but very fond of the solitude of the forest, and quite renowned as a marksman. He was amiable in disposition, gentle in his manners, and in all respects a good boy. He had a strong character. Whatever he undertook, he quietly and without any boasting performed. With sound judgment, and endowed with singular strength and elasticity, he was even then deemed equal to any man in all the requirements of frontier life.



At a short distance from the fort there was a saddler, and Mr. Carson, with the advice of friends, decided to apprentice his son, now called Kit, to learn that trade. The boy remained in this employment for two weary years. Though faithful to every duty, and gaining the respect and confidence of his employer, the work was uncongenial to him. He longed for the freedom of the wilderness; for the sublime scenes of nature, to which such a life would introduce him; for the exciting chase of the buffalo, and the lucrative pursuits of the trapper, floating on distant streams in the birch canoe, and loading his bark with rich furs, which ever commanded a ready sale.

All these little settlements were clustered around some protecting fort. A man, who was brought up in the remote West, furnishes the following interesting incident in his own personal experience. It gives a very graphic description of the alarms to which these pioneers were exposed:

"The fort to which my father belonged was three-quarters of a mile from his farm. But when this fort went to decay and was unfit for use, a new one was built near our own house. I well remember, when a little boy, the family were sometimes waked up in the dead of night by an express, with the report that the Indians were at hand. The express came softly to the door and by a gentle tapping raised the family. This was easily done, as an habitual fear made us ever watchful, and sensible to the slightest alarm. The whole family were instantly in motion.

"My father seized his gun and other implements of war. My mother waked up and dressed the children as well as she could. Being myself the oldest of the children, I had to take my share of the burdens to be carried to the fort. There was no possibility of getting a horse in the night to aid us. Besides the little children we caught up such articles of clothing and provisions as we could get hold of in the dark, for we durst not light a candle or even stir the fire. All this was done with the utmost dispatch and in the silence of death. The greatest care was taken not to awaken the youngest child.

"To the rest it was enough to say *Indian*, and not a whisper was heard afterward. Thus it often happened that the whole number belonging to a fort, who were in the evening at their homes, were all in their little fortress before the dawn of the next morning. In the course of the next day their household furniture was brought in by men under arms. Some families belonging to each fort were much less under the influence of fear than others. These often, after an alarm had subsided, in spite of every remonstrance, would remove home, while their more prudent neighbors remained in the fort. Such families were denominated *fool-hardy*, and gave no small amount of trouble by creating such frequent necessities of sending runners to warn them of their danger, and sometimes parties of our men to protect them during their removal."

While Kit Carson was impatiently at work on the bench of the harness-maker, feeding his soul with the stories, often greatly exaggerated, of the wonders of scenes and adventures to be encountered in the boundless West, a party of traders came along, who were on the route for Santa Fe. This city, renowned in the annals of the West, was the capital of the Spanish province of New Mexico. It was situated more than a thousand miles from Missouri, and contained a mongrel population of about three thousand souls. Goods from the States could be readily sold there at a profit of one or two hundred per cent. Cotton cloth brought three dollars a yard.

Captain Pike, upon his return from his exploring tour, brought back quite glowing accounts of Santa Fe and its surroundings. It was a long and perilous journey from Missouri. The party was all strongly armed, with their goods borne in packs upon mules and horses. They expected to live almost entirely upon the game they could shoot by the way. Kit, purely from the love of adventure, applied to join them. Gladly was he received. Though but a boy of eighteen, his stable character, his vigorous strength, and his training in all the mysteries of frontier life, rendered him an invaluable acquisition.

The perils to which they were exposed may be inferred from the fate which some traders encountered soon after Kit Carson's party had accomplished the journey. There were twelve traders returning from Santa Fe. To avoid the Indians they took an extreme southern route. Day after day they toiled along, encountering no savages. It was December, and in that climate mild and serene. A caravan of twenty horses or mules travelling in single file, leaves a trail behind which can easily be followed.

Our adventurers were on a treeless prairie, an ocean of land, where nothing obstructed the view to the remote horizon. One beautiful morning, just after they had taken their breakfast and resumed their march, they perceived, not a little to their alarm, some moving object far in the distance behind. It soon resolved itself into a band of several hundred Indians, well mounted, painted and decorated in the highest style of barbaric art. They were thoroughly armed with their deadly bows and arrows

and spears. It was indeed an imposing spectacle as these savage warriors on their fleet steeds, with their long hair and pennons streaming in the wind, came down upon them.

The little caravan halted and prepared for defence. There were twelve bold hearts to encounter several hundred foes on the open prairie. They knew that the main object of the Indians would be to seize the horses and mules and effect a stampede with their treasure. This being accomplished they would torture and murder the traders in mere wantonness. The savages had a very salutary caution of rifles which could throw a bullet twice as far as the strongest bow and the most sinewy arm could speed an arrow.

With the swoop of the whirlwind they approached until they came within gun-shot distance, when they as suddenly stopped. Each trader had fastened his horse or mule with a rope and an iron pin two feet long driven firmly into the ground. They knew that if they were captured a cruel death awaited them. They therefore prepared to sell their lives as dearly as possible. There was no trunk or tree, or stone behind which either party could hide. The open prairie covered with grass was smooth as a floor.

For a short time both bands stood looking at each other. The traders in a small group had every man his rifle. Had the Indians in their resistless strength come rushing simultaneously upon them, they could easily have been trampled into the dust. But it was equally certain that twelve bullets, with unerring aim, would have pierced the hearts of twelve of their warriors. The Indians were very chary of their own lives. They were never ready for a fight in the open field, however great might be the odds in their favor.

The savages having halted and conferred together, endeavored to assume a friendly attitude. With a great show of brotherly feeling they cautiously approached one by one. The traders not wishing to commence the conflict, began to move on, leading their animals and with their rifles cocked, watching every movement of the intruders. The mounted Indians followed along, quite surrounding with their large numbers the little band of white men.

Two of the mules lagged a little behind. One or two of the bolder of the savages made a dash at them and shot dead a man by the name of Pratt, who had them in charge. It was the signal of battle. A shower of arrows fell upon the traders, another man dropped dead, and an arrow buried its head in the thigh of another. Several of the Indians also fell. But the savages manifested a great dread of the rifle; and though they were forty to one against the white men, they retreated to a safe distance. As they felt sure of their victims, they did not wish to peril their own lives.

The traders hastily took the packs from the mules and piled them around for a barricade. The Indians were very wary. But by entirely surrounding the little fort and creeping through the long grass they succeeded in a few hours in shooting every one of the mules and horses of the traders. The savages kept up an incessant howling, and thirty-six dreadful hours thus passed away. It seemed but a prolongation of death's agonies. Hunger and thirst would ere long destroy them, even though they should escape the arrow and the tomahawk. It was not deemed wise to expend a single charge of powder or a bullet, unless sure of their aim. And the Indians crept so near, prostrated in the long grass, that not a head could be raised above the frail ramparts without encountering the whiz of arrows.

The day passed away. Night came and went. Another day dawned, and the hours lingered slowly along, while the traders lay flat upon the ground, cramped in their narrow limits, awaiting apparently the sure approach of death.

The night was dark, dense clouds obscuring the sky. The Indians themselves had become somewhat weary, and deeming it impossible for their victims to escape and feeling sure of the booty, which could by no possibility be removed, relaxed their watchfulness. As any death was preferable to captivity and torture by the Indians, the traders resolved, in the gloom of midnight to attempt an escape, though the chances were a hundred to one that they would be almost buried beneath the arrows of the howling savages.

Cautiously they emerged from their hiding-place, creeping slowly and almost breathlessly through the tall grass of the prairie, till quite to their surprise, they found themselves beyond the circle of the besiegers. There were ten men, one wounded, fleeing for life, expecting every moment to be pursued by five hundred savages. It was a long, dark, dismal winter's night, for in that changing clime a freezing night succeeded a sunny day. Like spectres they fled over the open prairie. That their flight might not be encumbered they had taken nothing with them but their guns and ammunition.

They were determined men. In whatever numbers and with whatever speed the mounted Indians might ride down upon them, ten of their warriors would inevitably bite the dust ere the fugitives could be taken. The Indians fully understood this. And when the morning dawned and they saw that their victims had escaped, instead of pursuing, they satisfied their valor in holding a triumphant powwow over the rich booty they had gained.

It was a chill day and the wind moaned dismally over the bleak prairie. But as far as the eye could extend no foe could be seen. Not even a tree obscured the vision. The exhaustion of the fugitives, from their thirty-six hours of sleeplessness and battle, and their rapid flight, was extreme. They shot a few prairie chickens, built a small fire of dried buffalo chips with which they cooked their frugal breakfast, and then, lying down upon the rank grass, slept soundly for a few hours.

They then pressed on their pathless way toward the rising sun. Through weary days and nights they toiled on, through rain and cold, sleeping often in stormy nights drenched, upon the bare soil, without even a blanket to cover their shivering frames. Their feet became blistered. Passing beyond the bounds of the open prairie, they sometimes found themselves in bogs, sometimes in tangled forests. There were streams to be waded or to be crossed upon such rude rafts as they could frame with their hatchets. Their clothes hung in tatters around them, and, most deplorable of all, their ammunition became expended.

For days they lived upon roots and the tender bark of trees. Some became delirious, indeed some seemed quite insane through their sufferings. The man who was wounded, Mr. Schenck, was a gentleman of intelligence and of refinement and of distinguished family connections, from Ohio. A poetic temperament had induced him to seek the romance of an adventure through the unexplored wilderness.

After incredible sufferings his wound became so inflamed that it was impossible for him to go any farther. Prostrate upon a mound in the forest his comrades left him. They could do absolutely nothing for him. They could not supply him with a morsel of food or with a cup of water. They had no heart even to bid him adieu. Silently they tottered along, and Mr. Schenck was left to die. Through what hours of suffering he lingered none but God can tell. Not even his bones were ever found to shed any light upon his sad fate.

So deep became the dejection of these wanderers that often for hours not one word was spoken. They were lost in the wilderness and could only direct their steps toward the rising sun. After leaving Mr. Schenck there were but nine men remaining. They soon disagreed in reference to the route to follow. This led to a separation, and five went in one direction and four in another. The five, after wandering about in the endurance of sufferings which can scarcely be conceived of, fell in with a party of friendly Creek Indians, by whom they were rescued and treated with the greatest humanity. Of the other four two only succeeded in escaping from the mazes of the wilderness.

Such were the perils upon which the youthful Kit Carson was now entering from the pure love of adventure. He was not uninformed respecting these dangers. The knowledge of them did but add to the zest of the enterprise.

Crossing the plains of the interior of our Continent from the Missouri river to the Rocky mountains, was a very different undertaking half a century ago, from what it has been in more modern times. The route was then almost entirely unexplored. There were no charts to guide. The bold adventurers knew not where they would find springs of water, where forage for their animals,

where they would enter upon verdureless deserts, where they could find fording-places of the broad and rapid rivers which they might encounter on their way.

This is not a forest-covered continent. The vast plains of the interior, whether smooth or undulating or rugged, spread far away for weary leagues, almost treeless. The forest was found mainly skirting the streams. Immense herds of buffaloes, often numbering ten or twenty thousand, grazed upon these rich and boundless pastures. Timid deer and droves of wild horses, almost countless in numbers, here luxuriated in a congenial home. There was scarcely a white man in the land whose eyes had ever beheld the cliffs of the Rocky mountains. And each Indian tribe had its hunting-grounds marked out with considerable precision, beyond which even the boldest braves seldom ventured to wander.

About a score of men started upon this trip. They were thoroughly armed, practiced marksmen, well mounted and each man led a pack mule, heavily laden with goods for the Santa Fe market. Their leader was commander-in-chief, whom all were bound implicitly to obey. He led the company, selecting the route, and he decided when and where to encamp. The procession followed usually in single file, a long line.

Early in the morning, at the sound of the bugle, all sprang from their couches which nature had spread, and they spent no more time at their toilet than did the horse or the cow. After a hurried breakfast they commenced their march. Generally an abundance of game was found on the way. The animals always walked slowly along, being never put to the trot.

At noon the leader endeavored to find some spot near a running stream or a spring, where the animals could find pasture. The resting for a couple of hours gave them time for their dinner, which they had mainly picked up by the way.

An hour or two before sundown the camping ground was selected, the animals were tethered, often in luxuriant grass, and the hardy pioneers, by no means immoderately fatigued by the day's journey, having eaten their supper, which a good appetite rendered sumptuous, spent the time till sleep closed their eyelids in telling stories and singing songs. A very careful guard was set, and the adventurers enjoyed sound sleep till, with the dawn, the bugle call again summoned them. Under ordinary circumstances hardy men of a roving turn of mind, found very great attractions in this adventurous life. They were by no means willing to exchange its excitements for the monotonous labors of the field or the shop.

CHAPTER II.

Life in the Wilderness

A Surgical Operation.—A Winter with Kin Cade.—Study of the Languages and Geography.—Return towards Missouri.—Engagement with a new Company and Strange Adventures.—The Rattlesnake.—Anecdote of Kit Carson.—The Sahara.—New Engagements.—Trip to El Paso.—Trapping and Hunting.—Prairie Scenery.—The Trapper's Outfit.—Night Encampment.—Testimony of an Amateur Hunter.

The company of traders which Kit had joined enjoyed, on the whole, a prosperous expedition. They met with no hostile Indians and, with one exception, encountered nothing which they could deem a hardship. There was one exception, which most persons would deem a terrible one. The accidental discharge of a gun, incautiously handled, shattered a man's arm, shivering the bone to splinters. The arm rapidly grew inflamed, became terribly painful, and must be amputated or the life lost. There was no one in the party who knew anything of surgery. But they had a razor, a handsaw and a bar of iron.

It shows the estimation in which the firm, gentle, and yet almost womanly Kit Carson was held, that he was chosen to perform the operation. Two others were to assist him. The sufferer took his seat, and was held firmly, that in his anguish his struggles might not interfere with the progress of the knife. This boy of but eighteen years then, with great apparent coolness, undertook this formidable act of surgery.

He bound a ligature around the arm very tightly, to arrest, as far as possible the flow of blood. With the razor he cut through the quivering muscles, tendons and nerves. With the handsaw he severed the bone. With the bar of iron, at almost a white heat, he cauterized the wound. The cruel operation was successful. And the patient, under the influence of the pure mountain air, found his wound almost healed before he reached Santa Fe.

Having arrived at his journey's end, Kit's love of adventure led him not to return with the traders, by the route over which he had just passed, but to push on still further in his explorations. About eighty miles northeast of Santa Fe there was another Spanish settlement, weird-like in its semi-barbarous, semi-civilized aspects, with its huts of sun-baked clay, its Catholic priests, its Mexican Indians and its half-breeds. It was a small, lonely settlement, whose population lived mainly, like the Indians, upon corn-meal and the chase. Kit ever kept his trusty rifle with him. His gun and hatchet constituted his purse, furnishing him with food and lodging.

It was a mountainous region; here in one of the dells, Kit came across the solitary hut of a mountaineer by the name of Kin Cade. They took a mutual liking to each other. As Kit could at any day, with his rifle bring in food enough to last a week, the question of board did not come into consideration. It was in the latter part of November that Kit first entered the cabin of this hunter. Here he spent the winter. His bed consisted probably of husks of corn covered with a buffalo robe, a luxurious couch for a healthy and weary man. Pitch pine knots brilliantly illumined the hut in the evening. Traps were set to catch animals for their furs. Deer skins were softly tanned and colored for clothing, with ornamental fringes for coats and leggins and moccasins. Kit and his companion Kin were their own tailors.

Thus passed the winter of 1826. Both of the men were very good-natured, and of congenial tastes. They wanted for nothing. When the wind howled amid the crags of the mountains and the storm beat upon their lonely habitation, with fuel in abundance and a well filled larder, and with no intoxicating drinks or desire for them, they worked upon their garments and other conveniences in the warmth of their cheerful fireside. It is not hazarding too much to say that these two gentle men, in their solitary cabin, passed a far more happy winter than many families who were occupying, in splendid misery, the palatial residences of London, Paris and New York.

Kin Cade was perhaps a Spaniard. He certainly spoke the Spanish language with correctness and fluency. The intelligence of Kit is manifest from the fact that he devoted himself assiduously during the winter to the acquisition of the Spanish language. And his strong natural abilities are evidenced in his having attained, in that short time, quite the mastery of the Spanish tongue. It is often said that Kit Carson was entirely an uneducated man. This is, in one respect, a mistake. The cabin of Kin Cade was his academy, where he pursued his studies vigorously and successfully for a whole winter, graduating in the spring with the highest honors that academy could confer.

We ought not to forget that, in addition to the study of the languages, he also devoted much attention to the study of geography. They had no books, no maps. It is doubtful indeed, whether either Kit or his teacher could read or write. But Kin had been a renowned explorer. He had traversed the prairies, climbed the mountains, followed the courses of the rivers, and paddled over the lakes. With his stick he could draw upon the smoothly trodden floor of his hut, everything that was needful of a chart. There were probably many idle students in Harvard and Yale, who during those winter months did not make as much intellectual progress as Kit Carson made.

In the spring of 1827, Kit again went forth from his winter's retreat into the wilderness world, which has its active life and engrossing excitements, often even far greater than are to be found on the city's crowded pavements. Not finding in these remote regions any congenial employment, Kit decided to retrace his steps to Missouri. Most persons would have thought that the journey of some thousand miles on foot, through a trackless wilderness where he was exposed every step of the way, to howling wolves and merciless savages, a pretty serious undertaking. Kit appears to have regarded it but as an every-day occurrence.

He joined a party of returning traders. Much of the region they traversed may be aptly described in the language which Irving applies to Spain. "It is a stern melancholy country, with rugged mountains and long sweeping plains, indescribably lonesome, solitary, savage." After travelling nearly five hundred miles, about half the distance back to Missouri, they reached a ford of the Arkansas river. Here they met another party of traders bound to Santa Fe. Kit, who with great reluctance had decided to return home, eagerly joined them. His services were deemed very valuable, and they offered him a rich reward. His knowledge of the Spanish language became now a valuable investment to him, and as he had already twice traversed the route, he was at once invested with the dignity of guide as well as interpreter.

The following incident, related by a traveller who was passing over this same plain under the guidance of Kit Carson, shows that there are other dangers to be encountered besides the prowling savage and the wolf:

"It was a bright moonlight night. I had, as was my custom, spread my saddle leathers for a bed, and had drawn my blanket closely around me. Weary with the day's march, I had been sleeping soundly for several hours, when about midnight I awoke suddenly with an unaccountable feeling of dread. It must have been a sort of instinct which prompted me, for in a moment I was upon my feet, and then, upon removing my blanket, I found a rattlesnake, swollen with rage and poison, coiled and ready to strike.

"I drew away the blanket which served as a mattress, intending to kill the reptile, when to my astonishment it glided away making its escape into a small opening in the ground directly beneath my bed. The whole matter was explained at once. The snake had probably been out to see a neighbor; and getting home after I was asleep, felt a gentlemanly unwillingness to disturb me. And, as I had taken possession of his dwelling he took part of my sleeping place, crawling under the blanket where he must have lain quietly by my side until I rolled over and disturbed him. I can scarcely say that I slept much more that night, and even Carson admitted that it made him a little nervous."

Kit Carson was not a garrulous man. He was much more given to reflection than to talk, and he was never known to speak boastfully of any of his achievements. It is the invariable testimony of all who knew him, that he was mild, gentle and unassuming, one of Nature's noblemen. While travelling

he scarcely ever spoke. Nothing escaped his keen eye. His whole appearance was that of a man deeply impressed with a sense of the responsibility of his office. He knew full well the treacherous character of the Indians, and that "the better part of valor is discretion."

He had often seen men killed at night by an invisible foe. From the impenetrable darkness which surrounded the camp fire, an arrow would come winged with death, piercing the heart of some mountaineer whose body was clearly revealed by the firelight. Kit Carson would never thus expose himself. He would always spread his blanket where the firelight would not reveal him.

"No, no boys," he would say to his often reckless comrades, "you may hang around the fire if you will. It may do for you, if you like it. But I do not wish to have a Digger Indian slip an arrow into me when I cannot see him."

A gentleman, who was guided over the plains by Kit, writes, "During this journey I have often watched Carson's preparation for the night. A braver man than Kit perhaps never lived. In fact, I doubt if he ever knew what fear was. But with all this he exercised great caution. While arranging his bed, his saddle, which he always used as a pillow, was disposed in such a manner as to form a barricade for his head. His pistols half cocked were placed above it, and his trusty rifle reposed beneath the blanket by his side, where it was not only ready for instant use but perfectly protected from the damp. Except now and then to light his pipe, you never caught Kit, at night, exposing himself to the full glare of the camp fire."

When on the march everything was conducted with military precision. At the early dawn as Kit gave the signal to prepare to start, all were instantly in motion. The mules were brought up; their packs were fastened firmly upon their backs, an operation which required much labor and skill. The mules have a strange instinct which leads them to follow with a sort of fascination a white horse. Thus generally a white horse or mare leads the cavalcade.

At times it was necessary to march long distances without meeting water. One of these dreary stretches was eighty miles long. It was necessary to pass over it as rapidly as possible, day and night almost without resting. In accomplishing one of these arduous journeys across a desert almost as bare as that of Sahara, the party set out one afternoon at three o'clock. One of the travellers writes:

"I shall never forget the impression which that night's journey left upon my mind. Sometimes the trail led us over large basins of deep sand, where the trampling of the mules' feet gave forth no sound. This, added to the almost terrible silence which ever reigns in the solitude of the desert, rendered our transit more like the passage of some airy spectacle where the actors were shadows instead of men. Nor is this comparison a strained one, for our way-worn voyagers, with their tangled locks and unshorn beards, rendered white as snow by the fine sand with which the air in these regions is often filled, had a weird and ghost-like look, which the gloomy scene around, with its frowning rocks and moonlit sands, tended to enhance and heighten."

It is said, as illustrative of Kit's promptness of action, that one night an inexperienced guard shouted "Indians." In an instant Kit was on his feet, pistol in hand. A dark object was approaching him. The loss of a second of time might enable a savage to bury his arrow-head deep in his side and to disappear in the darkness. Like a flash of lightning Kit fired and shot *his mule*. It was a false alarm.

The traders arrived safely in Santa Fe. Kit Carson, having faithfully performed his contract, began to look around for new adventures. Three hundred and fifty miles south of Santa Fe, there was the Mexican province of Chihuahua. It was a very rich mining district, and many adventurers had flocked to it from Spain. There was here a narrow valley of the Rio Grande about ten miles in extent, and quite well filled with the rude settlements of the miners. It is said that at one time there were nearly seventy thousand Spaniards and Indians scattered along the river banks in search of the precious metals.

A trading party was bound from Santa Fe to this region. Colonel Trammel was the leader of this party, and he eagerly secured the services of Kit Carson, who, in addition to his experience as a traveller, could also perform the functions of an interpreter. We have no record of the incidents

which occurred on this journey. As the route was well known, and there were no hostile Indians to be encountered, it was probably uneventful.

In this valley of El Paso, as it was called, Carson found about five thousand people, mostly on the right bank of the river. The rudeness of the style in which they lived painfully impressed him. There was far more comfort in the cabins he had left in Missouri.

The houses were of clay baked in the sun, with earthen floors. Window glass was a luxury unknown. It seems almost incredible that they should have had neither chairs, tables, knives nor forks. These Mexicans were scarcely one remove from the untamed savages of the wilderness. Young Carson found nothing to interest him or to invite his stay. He returned to Santa Fe. The summer had now passed and another winter come.

About a hundred and fifty miles north of Santa Fe there was a small collection of huts called Taos, inhabited by trappers and hunters. This pursuit of game for food and fur was the employment which was congenial to him above all others. He directed his steps to Taos and at once entered into an engagement with Mr. Ewing Young, making his cabin headquarters.

Hunting and trapping were somewhat different employments, though perhaps equally exciting. The hunter depended upon his rifle, and was mainly in search of food. Still the robe of the buffalo and the coat of the grizzly bear were very useful in various ways, in the cabin of the hunter, and the softly tanned skin of the deer was invaluable, furnishing every article of clothing, shirt, leggins and moccasins. The skins of these animals had also a market value.

But the trapper was in pursuit of furs only. Though the men engaged in this pursuit were occasionally exposed to great hardship and suffering, still, in general they probably had, in the gratification of congenial tastes, a full share of such happiness as this world can furnish.

Young Carson, at the age of nineteen, had no taste for the scholarly seclusion of Yale or Harvard, no desire to stand all day behind the counter of the dry-goods store, or to work amid the crowd and the hum of the factory; he had no wish for what is called society, or to saunter down Broadway with his cigar and his cane, to exhibit his tightly-fitting garments; but he did love to set out on a hunting and trapping expedition. Let us follow him in one of these adventures.

It is a bright morning of the Indian summer, far along in November. There is a small log cabin on a mound of the wilderness. A dense forest breaks the northern winds. A rippling stream runs by the door. Beyond lies the prairie rich in verdure and enamelled with gorgeous autumnal flowers. Herds of buffalo are grazing in groups of hundreds, sometimes of thousands, on the broad expanse. Gangs of deer are seen, graceful, beautiful, following in the train of the antlered bucks, and with scent so keen and eyes so piercing that it requires the utmost skill of the hunter to approach them within rifle shot. Clouds of prairie chickens and quails are floating here and there in their short flight. It is the paradise of the hunter. Let no one think this description overdrawn. It would be difficult to exaggerate the loveliness of the flower-spangled prairie on a bright autumnal day. Eden could scarcely have presented scenes more attractive.

Young Carson stands at the door of the cabin with a stout mule before him. The animal is strong and plump, having been feasting upon the wild oats growing luxuriantly around. Carson is packing his mule. His outfit consists of a Mexican blanket, rough, thick and warm; a supply of ammunition; a kettle; possibly a coffee-pot and some coffee, which have been obtained at Santa Fe; several iron traps; some dressed deerskin for replacing clothing and moccasins, a hatchet and a few other similar articles. In addition to his mule he may also take a pony to bear him on the way. Thus, if by accident, one give out, he has another animal to rely upon. And if very successful he may have furs enough to load them both on his return.

His costume consists of a hunting shirt of the soft and pliable deerskin, ornamented with long fringes and often dyed with bright vermilion. Pantaloon of the same material are also ornamented with fringes and porcupine's quills of various colors. Many a tranquil hour has been beguiled, in the long evenings and when the storm has beaten upon the hut, in fashioning these garments with artistic

taste, learned of the Indians. A flexible cap, often of rich fur, covers his head, and moccasins, upon which all the resources of barbaric embroidery have been expended, cover his feet.

His rifle is borne on his left shoulder. His powder horn and bullet pouch hang under his right arm. In his bullet pouch he also carries spare flints, steel and various odds and ends. Beneath the broad belt which encircles his waist there is a large butcher knife in a sheath of buffalo hide. There is a whetstone in a buckskin case made fast to the belt, and also a small hatchet or tomahawk.

Thus accoutred, our young hunter and trapper sets out in search of the most lonely ravine which he can find among the mountains. He would reach if possible, some solitary stream which no white man's eye had ever beheld. He has no road, no trail to guide him. He rides his pony and leads his mule. Over the prairie, through the forest, across the streams, in silence and in a solitude which to him is not lonely, he passes on his way.

Night comes. If pleasant, he unburdens his horse and mule; drives his iron pickets into the ground, to which his animals are attached by ropes about thirty feet long, generally in pastures of rich grass or wild oats; builds a fire, cooks his supper, rolls himself in his blanket and sleeps soundly till morning. If the weather is unpleasant it makes but little difference. He knows exactly what to do. In a short time he constructs a frail but ample shelter; and then, with his feet towards the fire, sleeps sweetly regardless of the storm. His animals have no more need of shelter than have the bears and the buffaloes.

This is the *ordinary* life of the hunter. There are, of course, exceptions when calamity and woe come. A joint may be sprained, a limb broken. Fire may burn, or Indians may come, bringing captivity and torture. But the ordinary life of the hunter, gratifying his natural taste, has many fascinations. This is evidenced by the eagerness with which our annual tourists leave their ceiled chambers, in the luxurious cities, to encamp in the wilderness of the Adirondacks or the Rocky mountains. There is not a restaurant in the Palais Royal, or on the Boulevards which can furnish such a repast as these men often find, from trout which they have taken from the brook, and game which their own rifles shot, have cooked at the fires which their own hands have kindled. A gentleman who spent a winter in this way, in the green and sheltered valleys of the Rocky mountains, writes:

"There was something inexpressibly exhilarating in the sensation of positive freedom from all worldly care, and a consequent expansion of the sinews, as it were, of mind and body, which made me feel as elastic as a ball of India rubber, and in such a state of perfect ease that no more dread of scalping Indians entered my mind, than if I had been sitting in Broadway, in one of the windows of the Astor House. The very happiest moments of my life have been spent in the wilderness of the Far West, with no friend near me more faithful than my rifle, and no companion more sociable than my horse and mules.

"With a plentiful supply of pine logs on the fire, and its cheerful blaze streaming far up into the sky, illuminating the valley far and near, and exhibiting the animals, with well filled bellies, standing contentedly over their picket-pins, I would sit enjoying the genial warmth, building castles in the air. Scarcely ever did I wish to exchange such hours of freedom for all the luxuries of civilized life. Such are the fascinations of the life of the mountain hunter that I believe that not one instance could be adduced of even the most polished and civilized of men, who had once tasted the sweets of its attendant liberty and freedom from every worldly care, not sighing once more to partake of its pleasures and allurements.

"A hunter's camp in the Rocky mountains is quite a picture. It is invariably made in a picturesque locality. Nothing can be more social and cheering than the welcome blaze of the camp fire on a cold winter's night."

Young Carson, alone with his horse and mule, would journey from fifty to a hundred miles, examining every creek and stream, keeping a sharp lookout for signs of beaver. Having selected his location, generally in some valley eight or ten miles in extent, with a winding stream circling through the centre, which he had reason to believe was well stocked with beaver, he would choose a position

for his camp. This would be more or less elaborate in its construction, according to the time he intended to spend there. But he would always find some sunny nook, with a southern exposure and a pleasing prospect, near the brook or some spring of sweet water, and, if possible, with forest or rock sheltering from the north winds.

In a few hours young Carson would construct his half-faced cabin, as the hunting-camp was called. A large log generally furnished the foundation of the back part of the hut. Four stout stakes were then planted in the ground so as to inclose a space about eight feet square. These stakes were crotched at the ends, so as to support others for the roof. The front was about five feet high, the back not more than four. The whole slope of the roof was from the front to the back. The covering was made of bark or slabs and sometimes of skins. The sides were covered in a similar way. The whole of the front was open. The smooth ground floor was strewed with fragrant hemlock branches, over which were spread blankets or buffalo robes. In front of the opening the camp fire could be built, or on the one side or the other, in accordance with the wind.

Thus in a few hours young Carson would erect him a home, so cosy and cheerful in its aspect as to be attractive to every eye. Reclining upon mattresses really luxurious in their softness, he could bask in the beams of the sun, circling low in its winter revolutions, or gaze at night upon the brilliant stars, and not unfrequently have spread out before him an extended prospect of as rich natural scenery as ever cheered the eye. He had no anxiety about food. His hook or his rifle supplied him abundantly with what he deemed the richest viands. He knew where were the tender cuts. He knew how to cook them deliciously. And he had an appetite to relish them.

Having thus provided himself with a habitation, he took his traps and, either on foot or on horseback, as the character of the region or the distance to be traversed might render best, followed along the windings of the stream till he came to a beaver dam. He would examine the water carefully to find some shallow which the beavers must pass in crossing from shoal to deep water. Here he would plant his trap, always under water, and carefully adjust the bait. He would then follow on to another dam, and thus proceed till six traps were set, which was the usual number taken on such an expedition.

Early every morning he would mount his horse or mule and take the round of his traps, which generally required a journey of several miles. The captured animals were skinned on the spot, and the skins only, with the tails which the hunters deemed a great luxury as an article of food, were taken to the camp. Then the skin was stretched over a framework to dry. When dry it was folded into a square sheet, the fur turned inward and a bundle made containing from ten to twenty skins tightly pressed and corded, which was ready for transportation. These skins were then worth about eight dollars per pound.

After an absence of three or four weeks, young Carson would return with his treasures, often several hundred dollars in value, to the rendezvous of Mr. Ewing Young at Taos. Soon again he would set out on another similar expedition. Thus Carson passed the winter of 1827.

CHAPTER III.

Among the Trappers

The Discomfited Trappers.—The New Party Organized.—A Battle with the Indians.—Trapping on the Colorado.—March to the Sacramento.—The Friendly Indians.—Crossing the Desert.—Instinct of the Mule.—The Enchanting Valley of the Colorado.—The Mission of San Gabriel.—Vast Herds of Cattle.—The Mission of San Fernando.—Adventures in the Valley of San Joaquin.—The Meeting of two Trapping Bands.—Reasons for Kit Carson's Celebrity.—A Military Expedition.—The Indian Horse Thieves.—The Pursuit and Capture.

Soon after Carson returned to the cabin of Mr. Young from one of his trapping expeditions, a party of trappers came back who had set out to explore the valley of the Colorado, in pursuit of furs. At Taos they were west of the Rocky mountains, and the route which they were to take led them still farther in a northwest direction, a distance of three or four hundred miles. It was known that the region was full of roving Indians, and it was not doubted that the savages, if they saw any chance of overpowering the trappers, would do so, and seize their effects, which to the Indians would prove booty of almost inconceivable value. The rifle gave the trappers such an advantage over the Indian, with his bow and arrows, that they never hesitated, when upon the open plain in encountering almost any superiority of numbers.

This party of eighteen trappers, with their horses and heavily laden mules, had advanced but a few days' journey, over an almost unexplored region, when they fell in with a powerful tribe of Indians, who, after a little palaver, seeing their weakness in numbers and the richness of their treasure, attacked them with great fury. The Indians had adroitly selected a spot where they could fight Indian fashion, from behind trees and logs. The battle lasted a whole day. We are not informed how many of either party fell in the fray. But the Indians seemed to swarm around the trappers in countless numbers, and the white men were, greatly to their chagrin, driven back with the loss of several mules.

As the discomfited party returned with their tale of disaster, the ire of Mr. Young was raised. It is a comment upon the number of men then roving the wilderness, that Mr. Young was in a short time enabled to organize another party of forty men, to resume the enterprise. It was a motley collection of Spaniards, Americans, Mexicans and half-breeds. Proudly this powerful band, well armed, well mounted and with heavily laden pack mules, commenced its adventurous march, burning with the desire to avenge the insult which the previous expedition had encountered.

Mr. Young had learned highly to prize the capabilities of young Carson, and engaged him to take a prominent position in this company on its hazardous tour. After a march of about a hundred miles, they reached the region occupied by the Indians who had attacked and defeated the former band. The savages, flushed by success, were all ready to renew the conflict. Mr. Young himself was the leader of the party. The Indians, by their gestures and shouts of defiance, gave unmistakable evidence of their eagerness for the fight.

There was some little delay as both parties prepared for the deadly strife. Mr. Young, a veteran in the tactics of the forest, posted his men with great sagacity. He had forty, as we have mentioned, in all. Twenty-five of them he hid in ambush. With the other fifteen he cautiously advanced, and at length, as if alarmed, halted. The eminences all in front of them, seemed filled with the plumed warriors. The previous conflict had taught them the powers of the deadly rifle bullet. They kept at a respectful distance, never advancing unless protected by some tree or rock.

But there were hundreds of savages almost surrounding the little band, and making the hills and plains resound with the hideous war-whoop. When the trappers halted and began slowly to draw back, a deafening shout arose from the triumphant foe, and in a simultaneous charge they advanced, but still cautiously, not venturing near enough to discharge their arrows. They were thus drawn along into the

trap. When fairly within rifle range, twenty-five unerring marksmen from their concealment, almost at the same instant, opened a death-dealing volley upon the surprised and bewildered warriors. The slaughter was terrible beyond anything they had ever, in their native battles, witnessed before. Twenty-five of their bravest warriors, for the bravest were in the advance, fell dead or severely wounded. The Indians were thrown into an utter panic.

The thunder, the lightning, and the death-bolts had come from they knew not where. With almost the rapidity of thought the rifles were again loaded and the whole united band rushed forward upon the Indians who were now flying wildly in all directions. Instinct taught them to perform all sorts of gyrations to avoid the bullets which pursued them. They made no attempt to rally, though many of their proud warriors were left behind lifeless, or struggling in the convulsions of death.

The power of the rifle was such that, in those days, forty or fifty men never hesitated to engage whole tribe, though it might number one or two thousand warriors. A man will fight with terrible persistence when he knows that defeat is inevitable death by torture. It is a thousandfold better to fall beneath the arrow, the tomahawk or the war-club, than to be consumed alive amid the jeers and tortures of yelling Indians inspired with demoniac instincts. Thus with the trapper it was always either victory or death.

These hostile warriors were punished with a severity never to be forgotten. The fugitives carried far and wide to other roving tribes the tidings of their disaster. The bold trappers proceeded on their way, encountering no more serious molestation. Smoke upon the distant hills indicated that their march was watched. If a trap was set at any distance from the night's encampment, it was pretty surely stolen. Or if a weary mule was left to recruit, a little behind, intending to bring him up in the morning, before the dawn he disappeared.

The whole party followed slowly down a tributary of the Colorado river, very successfully trapping upon the main stream and its branches, until they reached the head waters of the San Francisco river. They then divided, and Mr. Young with Carson and seventeen others proceeded several hundred miles farther west, to the valley of the Sacramento. Before setting out for this long journey, as it was uncertain what game they might find by the way, two or three days were devoted to hunting. The skins of three deer were converted into water tanks, which were without difficulty carried by the mules. They were induced to this caution because some friendly Indians had assured them that there was a great destitution of water by the way.

On their march they encountered a tribe of Indians in all their native wildness. They were very friendly though they had apparently never seen a white man before. Perhaps their friendliness was *because* they had never yet met any of the pale faces, from whom they subsequently suffered such great wrongs. These Indians presented remarkably fine specimens of the physical man. They were tall, erect and admirably proportioned. Their features were European, their eyes very full and expressive, and the dress of men and women simple in the extreme. They were all splendid horsemen, and often as they entered the camp at full speed on their spirited chargers, it seemed as though the steed and its rider, like the fabled centaur, were but one animal. Their bodies were painted and oiled so as to resemble highly polished mahogany.

The travellers found the information communicated to them by the friendly Indians to be true. For four days they travelled over a dreary, sandy waste, where there were neither streams nor springs. At the camping place each night there was given from the tanks, a small amount of water to each animal and man, but only enough to sustain life. A guard was set over the rest, for should any accident befall it the destruction of the whole party would be the probable consequence.

As they were toiling along the fifth day, painfully through the sand, the mules began to manifest a strange excitement. They pricked up their ears, snuffed the air, then began to rush forward with all the speed their exhausted strength would allow. The sagacious animals had scented water at the distance of nearly a mile. It was a clear running stream, fringed with grass and shrubs. When the first

mule reached the water, the remainder were scattered for a great distance along the trail. Here the party encamped and remained for two days to recruit.

The bags of deerskin were again filled with water and the journey was resumed. The route still led over a similar barren region, where both man and beast suffered great privations from the want of water. On the fourth day they came in sight of the splendid valley of the great Colorado. It was with a thrill of delight that they gazed upon its verdure and its luxuriance, which were an hundredfold enhanced from the contrast with the dreary region which they had just traversed.

In their march of eight days through this barren and gameless region, their provisions had become quite exhausted. They chanced to come across some Indians from whom they purchased an old mare. The animal was promptly cut up, cooked and eaten with great gusto. They also obtained, from the same Indians, a small quantity of corn and beans. In the rich meadows of the Colorado our adventurers again found abundance. They spent a few delightful days here, feasting, trapping and hunting. The animals found, for them, a paradise in the luxuriant pastures of wild oats.

Again the journey to the west was resumed. The account we have of their movements is so meagre that it is impossible to follow with accuracy the route they traversed. They followed for some leagues a river, when suddenly its waters disappeared. They apparently sank beneath the surface of the quicksands. Still there were indications which enabled them to follow the course of the river, until finally it rose again above the surface, and in the open air flowed on to the ocean.

At length they reached the celebrated Catholic Mission of San Gabriel, near the Pacific coast. The Mission was then in a flourishing condition. The statistics, published in 1829, indicate a degree of prosperity which seems almost incredible. More than a thousand Indians were attached to the Mission, and were laboring in its widely-extended fields, tending its herds and cultivating the soil. The poor Indians, who were often half starved upon the plains, found here light employment, shelter and abundant food. The statistics to which we refer, state that the Mission had seventy thousand head of cattle, four thousand two hundred horses, four hundred mules, and two hundred and fifty sheep.

These Missions, several of which were established in a line, within about fifty miles of the Pacific coast, belonged to the Spanish government, and were supported by the revenues of the crown. Animals multiplied with great rapidity upon those luxuriant and almost boundless prairies. They ranged sometimes, it was said, spreading out over a hundred thousand acres of wonderfully fertile pastures. There must of course, have been much guess-work in estimating the numbers of these vast herds, generally wandering unattended at their pleasure. But with such supplies of animal and vegetable food there was no fear of want. The indolent Indians consequently gathered around the Missions in great numbers. They were all fond of show, and not unwillingly became such Christians as consists in attending the ceremonies of the church.

The Mission, with its buildings, cultivated fields and vast herds, seemed like the garden of Eden to our weary travellers. They however, remained here but one day, as they were not on a tour of pleasure but in pursuit of furs. A day's travel brought them to another but much smaller Mission, called San Fernando. Without any delay they pushed on towards the west, their object being to enter the valley of the Sacramento river, where they had been told that beavers could be found in great abundance. They expected to reach the banks of this now renowned, but then scarcely known river, after a few days' journey in a northeast direction. They were now in a delightful region. The climate was charming. Brooks of crystal water, and well filled with fishes, often crossed their path. There was abundant forage for their cattle; and forest and prairie seemed alive with game.

They soon reached the banks of the San Joaquin, a lovely stream flowing northerly and emptying into the Sacramento near its mouth. There, finding a very eligible camping site, and many indications of beaver in the stream, Mr. Young halted his party, to rest for a few days, and in the meantime to set their traps. The general character of the scenery around them may be inferred from Mr. Bryant's description of a similar encampment in his overland journey to California.

"Finding here an abundance of grass, we remained the following day for the benefit of our animals. The valley was probably fifteen miles in length, with a variable width of two or three miles. It was a delightful spot. Wild plants grew in profusion, many-hued flowers studded its surface, and silvery streams, bordered by luxuriant verdure and shrubs, were winding through it. On both sides the mountains towered up by continuous elevations of several thousand feet, exhibiting a succession of rich vegetation, and then craggy and sterile cliffs, capped by virgin snow, the whole forming a landscape of rare combinations of the beautiful and sublime."

After a short rest the trappers continued their journey slowly, setting their traps on the San Joaquin and its tributaries. Pretty soon, much to their surprise, they saw indications that there was another band trapping on the same streams. In a short time they met, and it was found that the other party belonged to the Hudson Bay Company, and was commanded by Peter Ogden.

It is pleasant to record that the two parties, instead of fighting each other as rivals, cordially fraternized. For several weeks they trapped near together, often meeting and ever interchanging the courtesies of brotherly kindness. These men were from Canada. They were veterans in the profession of hunting and trapping, having long been in the employment of the Hudson Bay Company, and having served a regular apprenticeship to prepare them for their difficult and arduous employment. Here again the peculiarity of Kit Carson's character was developed. Instead of assuming that he knew all that was to be known about the wilderness, and the business in which he was engaged, he lost no opportunity of acquiring all the information he could from these strangers. He questioned them very carefully, and his experience was such as to enable him to ask just such questions as were most important.

There is scarcely a man in America who has not heard the name of Kit Carson. No man can make his name known among the forty millions of this continent, unless there be something extraordinary in his character and achievements. Kit Carson was an extraordinary character. His wide-spread fame was not the result of accident. His achievements were not merely impulsive movements. He was a man of pure mind, of high morality, and intensely devoted to the life-work which he had chosen. His studies during the winter in the cabin of Kin Cade, had made him a proficient in the colloquial Spanish language. This proved to him an invaluable acquisition. He had also gathered and stored away in his retentive memory all that this veteran ranger of the woods could communicate respecting the geography of the Far West, the difficulties to be encountered and the mode of surmounting them. And now he was learning everything that could be learned from these Canadian boatmen and rangers.

Already young Carson had attained eminence. It was often said, "No matter what happens, Kit Carson always knows at the moment exactly what is best to be done."

Both as a hunter and a trapper, though he had not yet attained the age of manhood, he was admitted to be the ablest man in the party. And his native dignity of person and sobriety of manners commanded universal respect. In this lovely valley both parties lived, as trappers, luxuriously. They were very successful with their traps. And deer, elk and antelope were roving about in such thousands, that any number could be easily taken. These were indeed the sunny, festival days of our adventurers.

The two united parties, trapping all the way, followed down the valley of San Joaquin to the Sacramento. Here they separated. The Hudson Bay Company set out for the Columbia river. Mr. Young and his party remained to trap in the valley of the Sacramento. At this time an event occurred which again illustrates the fearlessness, sagacity and energy of Kit Carson.

Not very far from their encampment there was the Catholic Mission of San Rafael. Some Indians belonging to that Mission, after committing sundry atrocities, fled, and took refuge in a distant Indian village. It was deemed important, in order that the Indians might be held under salutary restraint, that such a crime should not go unpunished. A force was sent to demand the surrender of the fugitives. But the Indians assumed a hostile attitude, refused to give up the criminals, and fiercely attacking the Mission party, drove them back with loss.

The Mission applied to the trappers for assistance. The request was promptly granted. Such a victory would puff up the Indians, render them insolent, and encourage them to make war upon other parties of the whites. Eleven volunteers were selected for the expedition, and the young and fragile Kit Carson was entrusted with the command. In manners he was gentle as a girl, with a voice as soft as that of a woman. He had no herculean powers of muscle, but he had mind, mental powers which had been developed in a hundred emergencies. And these stout, hardy veterans of the wilderness seem with one accord to have decided that he was the fitting one to lead them into battle, where they were to encounter perhaps hundreds of savage warriors.



Cautiously Kit Carson led his little band so as to approach the Indian village unperceived. At a given signal they raised the war-whoop and impetuously charged into the cluster of wigwams. As the terrified warriors rushed out of the huts, all unprepared for battle, these unerring marksmen laid them low. One-third of the warriors were slain. The rest fled in dismay. The village was captured with the women and the children. The victorious Carson then demanded the immediate surrender of the criminals. The next day they were brought in, strongly bound, and delivered to the Mission.

With his heroic little band Kit Carson returned to the encampment, apparently unconscious that he had performed any unusual feat.

The trappers purchased of the Mission sixty horses, paying for them in beaver skins, which always had a cash value. These horses were indispensable to the trapper. It required a large number to carry the packs of a successful trapping party. It would be impossible for the trappers to transport the packs upon their own backs. A party of forty trappers would need each a horse to ride. Then generally each man led a spare horse, lest the one he rode should break a limb or in any other way give out in the midst of the wilderness. If the expedition were successful, each trapper would have three or four horses or mules to lead or drive, laden with the packs of skins, the traps, camping utensils and a supply of food for an emergency. Thus a party of forty men would sometimes be accompanied by more than two hundred horses. Horses were cheap, and their food on the rich prairies cost nothing. But it was necessary to guard the animals with the greatest care, for the Indians were continually watching for opportunities to steal them.

Soon after Mr. Young, whose party it will be remembered now consisted of eighteen men, had made his purchase of horses, in preparation for a return, as the animals were feeding on the open prairie, a band of Indians succeeded one night in stealing sixty of them, and with their booty, like the wind they fled towards the valleys of the Snow mountains. Such a cavalcade of horses in one band, travelling over the turf of the prairie, would leave a trail behind which could easily be followed. The number of the Indian thieves was not known, though the boldness of the robbery and their tracks indicated that the band must have been large.

Twelve men were immediately detached to pursue the gang. Young Carson was then appointed leader. There were but fourteen horses left in the camp. Carson, having mounted his twelve men, had the other two horses led, to meet any emergency. Vigorously the pursuit was pressed. There was no difficulty in keeping the track. The Indian with all his cunning was never the equal of the far more intelligent white man. Indeed the ordinary savage was often but a grown-up child.

For more than one hundred miles Carson continued his pursuit before he came up with the robbers. They had already entered the green valleys of the Snowy mountains. The eagle eye of the pursuer saw some smoke circling up in the distance. No ordinary eye would have perceived it. Immediately he dismounted his men, and tethered the horses. The rifles were carefully examined, that every one might be loaded, primed, and in perfect order. The band then cautiously pressed forward, led by their boy captain, till they came to the entrance of a wild but lovely glen, where at the distance of perhaps a mile, they saw these savage warriors, enjoying all the luxury of a barbaric encampment. A mountain stream, rippled through the valley. The horses were grazing in the rich pasture. The thieves had killed six of the fat young horses, and having cooked them and feasted to utter repletion, were lounging around, basking in the sun, in the fullness of savage felicity. Little were they aware of the tempest of destruction and death about to burst upon them.

The Indians could not have chosen a more delightful spot for their encampment and their feast. Neither could they have selected a spot more favorable for the unseen approach of the pursuers. But the savages, having accomplished more than a hundred miles, deemed themselves perfectly safe.

Carson carefully reconnoitred the position, gave minute directions to his men, and they all, with the noiseless, stealthy movement of the panther, worked their way along until they were within rifle distance of their foes. Every man selected his victim and took deliberate aim. The signal was given. The discharge was simultaneous. Twelve bullets struck twelve warriors. Most of them dropped instantly dead. Almost with the rapidity of thought the rifles were loaded, and the little band rushed upon the bewildered, terror-stricken, bleeding savages. The Indians scattered in every direction. Eight were killed outright. Carson had no love of slaughter. Many more, in their flight, might have been struck by the bullet; but they were allowed to escape. All the horses were recovered excepting the six which the Indians had killed.

Great was the rejoicing in the camp when the victorious party returned so abundantly successful. One of the annalists of this extraordinary man speaking of the enterprise, very truthfully writes:

"Carson, though at that day a youth in years and experience, had risen rapidly in the estimation of all, and had excited the admiration and enlisted the confidence of the entire band. When called upon to add his counsel, concerning any doubtful enterprise, his masterly foresight and shrewdness, as well as clearness in attending to details, gave him willing auditors.

"But it was the modest deportment he invariably wore, which won for him the love of his associates. Kit Carson's power in quickly conceiving the safest plan of action in difficult emergencies, and his bravery, which in his youth, sometimes amounted to rashness, caused his companions to follow his leadership. His courage, promptitude, self-reliance, caution, sympathy and care for the wounded, marked him at once as the master mind. Like the great Napoleon, when he joined the army for his first campaign, he was a hero, in spite of his youth, among men grown grey with experience."

The highest style of manhood, the most attractive character is that in which the mildness and the delicacy of the woman is combined with the energy and the fearlessness of the man. In Kit Carson we witness a wonderful combination of these two qualities. An acquaintance of the writer, who spent many years of his early life roving through the wilderness of the far West, and who had often met Kit Carson, said he never heard an oath from his lips. Even the rude and profane trappers around him could appreciate the superior dignity of such a character.

Rev. Dr. Bushnell, speaking of the region in which our trappers were engaged, says, "Middle California, lying between the head waters of the two great rivers, and about four hundred and fifty or five hundred miles long from north to south, is dividend lengthwise parallel to the coast, into three strips or ribbons of about equal width. First the coastwise region comprising two, three, and sometimes four parallel tiers of mountains, from five hundred to four thousand, five thousand or even ten thousand feet high. Next, advancing inward we have a middle strip, from fifty to seventy miles wide, of almost dead plain, which is called the great valley; down the scarcely perceptible slopes of which from north to south, and south to north run the two great rivers, the Sacramento and the San Joaquin, to join their waters at the middle of the basin, and pass off to the sea. The third long strip or ribbon is the slope of the Snowy mountain chain which bound the great valley on the East, and contains in its foothills, or rather its lower half, all the gold mines."

It was in this middle region called The Great Valley, that Mr. Young and his trappers pursued their vocation. They commenced far south, at the head waters of the San Joaquin, and trapped down that stream, a distance of about one hundred and fifty miles. They then struck the greater flood of the Sacramento, and followed up that stream nearly three hundred and fifty miles. They had now obtained furs enough to load down all the horses and mules at their disposal. They prepared to return to Santa Fe, where they were sure of a ready market for their furs, which would be sent to Europe for their final sale.

CHAPTER IV.

Conflicts with the Indians

The American Trapper.—The Trapper of the Hudson's Bay Company.—The Return Trip.—Polished Life in the Wilderness.—The Spanish Gentlemen.—Council of the Trappers.—Self-possession of Kit Carson.—The Camp Cleared of Intruders.—Robbing the Robbers.—Sale of the Furs.—Mr. Fitzpatrick's Expedition.—Pains and Pleasures of Rocky Mountain Life.—Pursuit of Indian Horse Thieves.—Extraordinary Battle.

In the last chapter we have alluded to the friendly meeting, in the valley of San Joaquin, of the American trappers with a party from Canada, sent out by the Hudson's Bay Company. It is a remarkable fact, but one which all will admit, that the Hudson's Bay Company maintained far more friendly relations with the Indians than the Americans secured. In fact, they seldom had any difficulty with them whatever. The following reasons seem quite satisfactorily to explain this difference. It is said:

"The American trapper was not like the Hudson's Bay employees, bred to the business. Oftener than any other way he was some wild youth who, after some misdemeanor in the society of his native place, sought safety from reproach or punishment in the wilderness. Or he was some disappointed man, who with feelings embittered towards his fellows, preferred the seclusion of the forest and mountain. Many were of a class disreputable everywhere, who gladly embraced a life not subject to social laws. A few were brave, independent and hardy spirits, who delighted in the hardships and wild adventures their calling made necessary. All these men, the best with the worst, were subject to no will but their own. And all experience goes to prove that a life of perfect liberty is apt to degenerate into a life of license.

"Even their own lives, and those of their companions, when it depended upon their own prudence, were but lightly considered. The constant presence of danger made them reckless. It is easy to conceive how, under these circumstances, the natives and the foreigners grew to hate each other, in the Indian country, especially after the Americans came to the determination to 'shoot an Indian at sight.'

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

It was the month of September when Mr. Young and his party set out on their return. The homeward route was essentially the same which they had already traversed. They made a brief visit at the Mission of San Fernando, and then pressed on to the flourishing Mission village of Los Angeles. This City of the Angels, as it was called, from the salubrity of the climate and the beauty of the scenery, was on a small river about four hundred and fifty miles southeast from the present site of San Francisco.

Here Mr. Carson was introduced to a scene of refined, and polished life, such as he had never witnessed before. He was informed that a Spanish gentleman of wealth was residing, at the distance of a few miles, on one of the most highly cultivated farms in the country. Young Carson, who never allowed any opportunity of extending his knowledge to escape him, dressed himself carefully in his best apparel, mounted a fine horse, well caparisoned, and set out to pay the Spaniard a visit.

He reached the *ranch*, as the farm was called, dismounted at a wicket gate, and having fastened his horse, walked up several rods, over a gravelled-walk, and beneath an avenue of trees, with occasional clumps of shrubs and flowers, until he reached the residence. It consisted of a spacious one story edifice, built of sun-baked bricks, called *adobe*. The dwelling was a hundred feet long, and the roof was rendered impenetrable to rain, being covered with a thick coating of asphaltum, mingled with sand. There was a spring of this valuable pitchy substance near the village; and the roofs of all the houses in Los Angeles were similarly covered.

A huge brass knocker was attached to the door. In response to its summons, an Indian girl made her appearance, and ushered him into an elegantly furnished parlor. There were several guitars lying about, with other indications that there were ladies in the household. Soon the gentlemanly owner of the farm appeared, in morning gown and slippers. He was a fine looking man, of dignified address, and courteously he saluted the stranger.

There was a native air of refinement about Kit Carson, with his highly intellectual features, and his modest, self-possessed bearing, which seemed always to win, at sight, interest and confidence. Carson introduced himself as an American, though he spoke in the Spanish language. His host, evidently much pleased with his guest, replied in English, saying:

"I address you in your native tongue, which I presume is agreeable to you, though you speak very good Spanish."

The parties were immediately on the most friendly terms. Carson sought information which the Spanish gentleman was able and happy to give. It was an early hour in the morning. Carson was invited to remain to breakfast, and was soon conducted to the breakfast-room, where he was introduced to the wife of his host, and several sons and daughters.

There was no restraint in conversation, as both parties could speak, with equal apparent facility, the Spanish and the English. There was a young gentleman from Massachusetts, a graduate from a New England college, who was private tutor in the family. After breakfast the stranger was conducted around the farm, and to the vineyard.

"I have more grapes," said the host, "than I know what to do with. Last year I made more butts of wine than I could dispose of, and dried five thousand pounds of raisins. I have travelled through Europe, and I think that neither the valley of the Rhine nor the Tagus can produce such grapes as ours. I think that the Los Angeles grape is indeed food for angels. They are equal to the grapes of Eschol. You remember the heavy clusters that were found there, so that two men carried one on a pole resting upon their shoulders. See that vine now. It is six inches in diameter. And yet it needs a prop to sustain the weight of the two clusters of grapes which it bears."

"I have more oranges," he said, "than I can either use or give away. This is the finest country the sun shines upon. We can live luxuriously upon just what will grow on our own farms. But we cannot get rich. Our cattle will only bring the value of the hides. Our horses are of little worth, for there are plenty running wild, which a good huntsman can take with a lasso. I think that we shall have the Americans with us before many years, and, for my part, I hope we shall. The idea of the Californians generally, as well as other Mexicans, that the Americans are too shrewd for them, is true enough. But certainly there is plenty of room for a large population, and I should prefer that the race that has most enterprise should come and cultivate the country with us."

Thus the conversation continued for two hours. Young Carson modestly suggested that it would be better if the Spaniards were less cruel in breaking in their horses.

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

"I sometimes think so too," the Spanish gentleman replied. "We mount one just caught from the drove, and ride him until he becomes gentle from exhaustion. Our custom is brought from Spain."

It answers well enough with us, where our horses go in droves; and when one is used up, we turn him out and take up another."

When young Carson took his leave, the Spaniard, with true Castilian courtesy, pressed his hand, thanked him for his visit, and promised to return it at the camp. It was thus instinctively that Kit Carson, naturally a gentleman, took his position among gentlemen.

In the meantime most of the rude trappers, seeming to be almost of a different nature from Kit Carson, were indulging in a drunken carouse at Los Angelos. They got into a brawl with the Mexicans. Knives were drawn, wounds inflicted, and one Mexican was killed.

It became necessary to get these men away as soon as possible. Carson was sent forward a day's march, with all who could be collected. The next day Mr. Young followed, having with much difficulty gathered the remainder of the band. Soon the party was reunited, and the men were recovered from their shameful debauch. Then for nine days they vigorously continued their march homeward, when they again reached the banks of the Colorado river, not far from the spot where they had crossed it before.

Here they encamped for a few days, while most of the men ranged the stream for many miles up and down, still very successfully setting their traps. Carson, with half a dozen men, was left to guard the camp. It was a responsible position. Nearly all the horses were there, and all the treasures of furs which they had gathered in their long and laborious excursion. As the animals were turned out to graze, the packs, which were taken from them, were arranged in a circular form so as to enclose quite a space, like a fortress. These bundles of furs not even a bullet could penetrate. Thus Kit Carson reared for himself and men a rampart, as General Jackson protected his troops with cotton bags at New Orleans.

Scarcely was this work completed, when a band of five hundred Indians was seen approaching. As usual, they stopped at a short distance from the fortified camp, and a few of the warriors, laying aside their arms and expressing by words and gestures the utmost friendliness, came forward and were admitted into the camp. They were followed by others. Soon there were enough stalwart savages there easily to overpower, in a hand-to-hand fight, the feeble garrison of but six men. Carson's suspicions were excited, and watching their movements with an eagle eye, he soon discovered that they all had concealed weapons.

Without the slightest apparent alarm he quietly summoned his men, with their rifles, into one corner of the enclosure. Then in his usual soft voice he directed each man to take deliberate aim at some one of the prominent chiefs. He himself presented the muzzle of his rifle within a few yards of the head of the leader of the now astonished and affrighted party. This was all the work of a moment. Then calmly he said to the leader, "leave this fort instantly or you are dead men." A moment of hesitation on their part, a word of parleying would have been followed by the simultaneous discharge of the rifles, and six of the warriors at least, would have been numbered with the dead. In a moment the fort was cleared, and the savages did not stop until they had got beyond the reach of rifle bullets.

One of these Indians could speak Spanish. Thus Kit Carson again found the inestimable advantage of his winter's studies in the cabin of Kin Cade. The Indians, five hundred in number, might easily, at the expense of the loss of a few lives, have overpowered the white men, and seized all their animals and their goods. But Carson well knew their habits, and that they would never hazard a contest where they must with certainty expect a number of their own warriors to be slain. Friendly relations were opened with the Indians, only two or three being admitted to the fort at a time. The animals were tethered in the rich herbage within the protection of their rifles and were carefully watched, night and day.

In a few days the men who had left the camp on a trapping expedition, returned. The whole united company then followed down the south bank of the Colorado, setting their traps every night, until they reached its tide waters. From that point they struck over east to the river Gila, and trapped

up the western banks of that river until they reached the mouth of the San Pedro, a distance of more than two hundred miles.

Their animals now were very heavily laden with furs, and they were in great need of more beasts of burden. The following is the account which is given of the manner in which they obtained a supply. It certainly looks very suspicious. It is not improbable that the Indians, had they any historians, would give a very different version of the story.

"Near the mouth of the San Pedro river they discovered a large herd of horses and mules. On a closer examination they found that they were in possession of a band of Indians, who had formerly given them some of their gratuitous hostilities. Not having forgotten their former troubles with these people, they determined to pay them off in their own coin by depriving them of the herd. A short search sufficed to discover the Indian camp. Without waiting an instant, they put their horses to their speed, and charged in among the huts. The Indians were so completely taken by surprise, that they became panic-struck, and fled in every direction. They however rallied somewhat and a running fight commenced, which lasted some time, but which did not change matters in favor of the Indians. The entire herd fell into the possession of the trappers.

"On the same evening, after the men had wrapped themselves up in their blankets, and laid down for sleep, and while enjoying their slumbers, a noise reached their ears which sounded very much like distant thunder. But a close application of the sense of hearing showed plainly that an enemy was near at hand. Springing up, with rifle in hand, for generally in the mountains a man's gun rests in the same blanket with himself, on all sleeping occasions, they sallied forth to reconnoitre, and discovered a few warriors driving along a band of at least two hundred horses. The trappers comprehended instantly that the warriors had been to the Mexican settlement in Sonora, on a thieving expedition, and that the horses had changed hands, with only one party to the bargain. The opportunity to instill a lesson on the savage marauders was too good to be lost.

"They saluted the thieves with a volley from their rifles, which, with the bullets whizzing about their heads and bodies, so astonished them that they seemed almost immediately to forget their stolen property, and to think only of a precipitous flight. In a few moments the whites found themselves masters of the field and also of the property. To return the animals to their owners was an impossibility. Mr. Young, therefore, selected as many of the best horses as he needed for himself and men, and, game being very scarce, killed two, and dried most of the meat for future use, turning the remainder loose."

Such were the morals of the wilderness. Mr. Young resolved himself into a court, of which he was legislator, judge, jury and executioner. The property of others he could confiscate at pleasure, for his own use. The Indians probably retaliated upon the first band of white men which came within their power. And this retaliation would be deemed an act of wanton savage barbarism demanding the extinction of a tribe.

Continuing their march up the Gila river, trapping all the way, from its head waters they struck across the country to Santa Fe. Here they found a ready market for their furs, at twelve dollars a pound. Their mules were laden down with two thousand pounds. Thus the pecuniary results of the trip amounted to the handsome sum of twenty four thousand dollars. The trappers, flush with money, returned to Taos. The vagabonds of the party soon squandered their earnings in rioting, and were then eager to set out on another excursion. It was now April, 1830.

Young Carson was at this time a very handsome young man of twenty-one years. He had obtained a high reputation, and his pockets were full of money, with which he scarcely knew what to do. It is said that, for a time, he was led astray by the convivial temptations with which he was surrounded. To what length he went we cannot ascertain. There is no available information upon this point. Perhaps the whole story is but one of those slanders to which all men are exposed. One of his annalists writes:

"Young Kit, at this period of his life, imitated the example set by his elders, for he wished to be considered by them as an equal and a friend. He however passed through this terrible ordeal, which most frequently ruins its votary, and eventually came out brighter, clearer and more noble for the conscience polish which he received. He contracted no bad habits, but learned the usefulness and happiness of resisting temptation; and became so well schooled that he was able, by the caution and advice of wisdom founded on experience, to prevent many a promising and skilful hand from grasping ruin in the same vortex."

In the fall of this year Kit joined another trapping expedition. Its destination was to the innumerable streams and valleys among the Rocky mountains. Mr. Fitzpatrick, a man of good reputation and a veteran trapper, had charge of the party. Crossing a pass of the Rocky mountains, they pursued their route in a direction nearly north, a distance of about three hundred miles, till they reached the head waters of the Platte river. They were now on the eastern side of those gigantic ranges which form the central portion of the North American Continent.

Here, in the midst of the mountains, the winter was inclement, with piercing blasts and deep snows. Still the trappers, warmly clad, vigorously pursued both hunting and trapping, availing themselves of every pleasant day. In inclement weather they gathered joyously around their ample camp-fires, finding ever enough to do in cooking, dressing their skins, repairing garments, making moccasins, and in keeping their guns and knives in order. Some of these valleys were found sheltered and sunny. Even in mid-winter there were days of genial warmth. They occasionally changed their camp and trapped along the banks of the Green, the Bear and the Salmon rivers.

During the winter one sad incident occurred. Four of the trappers who were out in pursuit of game, were surrounded and overpowered by a numerous party of Blackfeet Indians, and all were killed. There were buffaloes in abundance in that region, and these animals found ample forage, as they had the range of hundreds of miles, and instinct guided them to sheltered and verdant glens. But in some of the narrow, wind-swept valleys the animals of the trappers suffered from exposure and want of food. They were kept alive by cutting down cottonwood trees and gathering the bark and branches for fodder. But the trappers themselves, having abundance of game, fared sumptuously.

The beaver is so intelligent that he is one of the most difficult animals in the world to entrap. Marvellous stories are told by the hunters of his sagacity. Many of the Indians believe that the beavers have human intelligence. They say that the only difference between the beaver and the Indian, is that the latter has been endowed by the Great Spirit with capabilities to catch the former.

Among these bleak, barren, gigantic ridges there are many lovely valleys to be found, scores of miles in length and width. Here are found two extensive natural parks, of extraordinary beauty. Apparently no landscape gardener could have laid them out more tastefully. There are wide-spread lawns, sometimes level as a floor, sometimes gently undulating, smooth, green and at times decorated with an almost inconceivable brilliance of flowers. Here and there groves are sprinkled, entirely free from underbrush. There are running streams and crystal lakelets. Birds of brilliant plumage sport upon the waters. Buffaloes, often in immense numbers, crop the luxuriant herbage. Deer, elks and antelopes bound over these fields, reminding one of his childish visions of Paradise. In the streams otter and beaver find favorite haunts.

During the winter, as business was a little dull, Kit Carson and four of his companions set off on a private hunting expedition. They were gone about six weeks. Soon after their return, in the latter part of January, a party of Crow Indians, one very dark night, succeeded in stealthily approaching the camp and in driving off nine of the animals which were grazing at a short distance. It was not until morning that the loss was discovered.

As usual Kit Carson was sent, at the head of twelve men, in pursuit of the thieves. They selected their best horses, for it was certain that the Indians would make no delay in their flight. It was found quite difficult to follow their trail, for, during the night, a herd of several thousand buffaloes had

crossed and recrossed it, quite trampling it out of sight. Still the sagacity of Carson triumphed, and after being baffled for a short time, he again with certainty struck the trail.

For forty miles the pursuit was continued with much vigor. The horses then began to give out. Night was approaching. Carson thought it necessary to go into camp till morning, that the horses might be refreshed and recruited. There was a grove near by. Just as they were entering it for their sheltered encampment, Kit Carson saw the smoke of Indian fires at no great distance in advance of him. He had no doubt that the smoke came from the encampment of the party he was pursuing.

The Indians had fled from the north. Of course it would be from the north that they would look for the approach of their pursuers. The southern borders of their camp would consequently be less carefully guarded. The trappers remained quietly in their hiding-place until midnight. They then took a wide circuit, so as to approach the Indians from the south. The savages seemed to have lost all fear of pursuit, for the gleam of their triumphal fires shone far and wide, and the shouts of their barbaric revelry resounded over the prairie.

Very cautiously Carson and his men approached, availing themselves of every opportunity of concealment, creeping for a long distance upon their hands and knees. Having arrived within half gunshot they gazed upon a very singular spectacle, and one which would have been very alarming to any men but those accustomed to the perils of the wilderness.

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