

miles below the head of Grand Island, which lay extended before us, covered with dense and heavy woods. From the mouth of the Kansas, according to our reckoning, we had travelled three hundred and twenty-eight miles; and the geological formation of the country we had passed over consisted of lime and sandstone, covered by the same erratic deposit of sand and gravel which forms the surface rock of the prairies between the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. Except in some occasional limestone boulders, I had met with no fossils. The elevation of the Platte Valley above the sea is here about two thousand feet. The astronomical observations of the night placed us in longitude  $98^{\circ} 45' 49''$ , latitude  $40^{\circ} 41' 06''$ .

*June 27th.*—The animals were somewhat fatigued by their march of yesterday, and, after a short journey of eighteen miles along the river-bottom, I encamped near the head of Grand Island, in longitude, by observation,  $99^{\circ} 05' 24''$ , latitude  $40^{\circ} 39' 32''$ . The soil here was light but rich, though in some places rather sandy; and, with the exception of a scattered fringe along the bank, the timber, consisting principally of poplar (*populus monilifera*), elm, and hackberry (*celtis crassifolia*), is confined almost entirely to the islands.

*June 28th.*—We halted to noon at an open reach of the river, which occupies rather more than a fourth of the valley, here only about four miles broad. The camp had been disposed with the usual precaution, the horses grazing at a little distance attended by the guard, and we were all sitting quietly at our dinner on the grass, when suddenly we heard the startling cry, "*du monde!*" In an instant every man's weapon was in his hand, the horses were driven in, hobbled, and picketed, and horsemen were galloping at full speed in the direction of the new-comers, screaming and yelling with the wildest excitement. "Get ready, my lads!" said the leader of the approaching party to his men, when our wild-looking horsemen were discovered bearing down upon them; "*Nous allons attraper des coups de baguette.*" They proved to be a small party of fourteen, under the charge of a man named John Lee, and, with their baggage and provisions strapped to their backs, were making their way on foot to the frontier. A brief account of their fortunes will give some idea of navigation in the Nebraska. Sixty days since, they had left the mouth of Laramie's fork, some three hundred miles above, in barges laden with the furs of the American Fur Company. They started with the annual flood, and, drawing but nine inches water, hoped to make a speedy and prosperous voyage to St. Louis; but, after a lapse of forty days, found themselves only one hundred and thirty miles from their point of departure. They came down rapidly as far as Scott's bluffs, where their difficulties began. Sometimes they came upon places where the water was spread over a great extent, and here they toiled from morning until night, en-

deavoring to drag their boat through the sands, making only two or three miles in as many days. Sometimes they would enter an arm of the river, where there appeared a fine channel, and, after descending prosperously for eight or ten miles, would come suddenly upon dry sands, and be compelled to return, dragging their boat for days against the rapid current; and at others they came upon places where the water lay in holes, and, getting out to float off their boat, would fall into water up to their necks, and the next moment tumble over against a sand-bar. Discouraged at length, and finding the Platte growing every day more shallow, they discharged the principal part of their cargoes one hundred and thirty miles below Fort Laramie, which they secured as well as possible, and, leaving a few men to guard them, attempted to continue their voyage, laden with some light furs and their personal baggage. After fifteen or twenty days more struggling in the sands, during which they made but one hundred and forty miles, they sunk their barges, made a *cache* of their remaining furs and property in trees on the bank, and, packing on his back what each man could carry, had commenced, the day before we encountered them, their journey on foot to St. Louis.

We laughed then at their forlorn and vagabond appearance, and in our turn, a month or two afterward, furnished the same occasion for merriment to others. Even their stock of tobacco, that *sine qua non* of a voyageur, without which the night-fire is gloomy, was entirely exhausted. However, we shortened their homeward journey by a small supply from our own provision. They gave us the welcome intelligence that the buffalo were abundant some two days' march in advance, and made us a present of some choice pieces, which were a very acceptable change from our salt pork. In the interchange of news and the renewal of old acquaintanceships we found wherewithal to fill a busy hour; then we mounted our horses, and they shouldered their packs, and we shook hands and parted. Among them I had found an old companion on the northern prairie, a hardened and hardly served veteran of the mountains, who had been as much hacked and scarred as an old *moustache* of Napoleon's "Old Guard." He flourished in the soubriquet of La Tulipe, and his real name I never knew. Finding that he was going to the States only because his company was bound in that direction, and that he was rather more willing to return with me, I took him again into my service. We travelled this day but seventeen miles.

At our evening camp, about sunset, three figures were discovered approaching, which our glasses made out to be Indians. They proved to be Cheyennes—two men and a boy of thirteen. About a month since, they had left their people on the south fork of the river, some three hundred miles to the westward, and, a party of only four in number, had been



to the Pawnee villages on a horse-stealing excursion, from which they were returning unsuccessful. They were miserably mounted on wild horses from the Arkansas plains, and had no other weapons than bows and long spears; and had they been discovered by the Pawnees, could not, by any possibility, have escaped. They were mortified by their ill success, and said the Pawnees were cowards who shut up their horses in their lodges at night. I invited them to supper with me, and Randolph and the young Cheyenne, who had been eying each other suspiciously and curiously, soon became intimate friends. After supper we sat down on the grass, and I placed a sheet of paper between us, on which they traced rudely, but with a certain degree of relative truth, the water-courses of the country which lay between us and their villages, and of which I desired to have some information. Their companions, they told us, had taken a nearer route over the hills; but they had mounted one of the summits to spy out the country, whence they had caught a glimpse of our party, and, confident of good treatment at the hands of the whites, hastened to join company. Latitude of the camp,  $40^{\circ} 39' 51''$ .

We made the next morning sixteen miles. I remarked that the ground was covered in many places with an efflorescence of salt, and the plants were not numerous. In the bottoms was frequently seen *tradescantia*, and on the dry benches were *carduus*, *cactus*, and *amorphæa*. A high wind during the morning had increased to a violent gale from the northwest, which made our afternoon ride cold and unpleasant. We had the welcome sight of two buffaloes on one of the large islands, and encamped at a clump of timber about seven miles from our noon halt, after a day's march of twenty-two miles.

The air was keen the next morning at sunrise, the thermometer standing at  $44^{\circ}$ , and it was sufficiently cold to make overcoats very comfortable. A few miles brought us into the midst of the buffalo, swarming in immense numbers over the plains, where they had left scarcely a blade of grass standing. Mr. Preuss, who was sketching at a little distance in the rear, had at first noted them as large groves of timber. In the sight of such a mass of life, the traveller feels a strange emotion of grandeur. We had heard from a distance a dull and confused murmuring, and when we came in view of their dark masses there was not one among us who did not feel his heart beat quicker. It was the early part of the day, when the herds are feeding; and everywhere they were in motion. Here and there a huge old bull was rolling in the grass, and clouds of dust rose in the air from various parts of the bands, each the scene of some obstinate fight. Indians and buffalo make the poetry and life of the prairie, and our camp was full of their exhilaration. In place of the quiet monotony of the march, relieved only by the cracking of the whip,

and an "*avance donc! enfant de garce!*" shouts and songs resounded from every part of the line, and our evening camp was always the commencement of a feast which terminated only with our departure on the following morning. At any time of the night might be seen pieces of the most delicate and choicest meat, roasting *en appolas*, on sticks around the fire, and the guard were never without company. With pleasant weather and no enemy to fear, an abundance of the most excellent meat, and no scarcity of bread or tobacco, they were enjoying the oasis of a voyageur's life. Three cows were killed to-day. Kit Carson had shot one, and was continuing the chase in the midst of another herd, when his horse fell headlong, but sprang up and joined the flying band. Though considerably hurt, he had the good fortune to break no bones; and Maxwell, who was mounted on a fleet hunter, captured the runaway after a hard chase. He was on the point of shooting him, to avoid the loss of his bridle (a handsomely mounted Spanish one), when he found that his horse was able to come up with him. Animals are frequently lost in this way; and it is necessary to keep close watch over them in the vicinity of the buffalo, in the midst of which they scour off to the plains and are rarely retaken. One of our mules took a sudden freak into his head, and joined a neighboring band to-day. As we were not in a condition to lose horses, I sent several men in pursuit, and remained in camp, in the hope of recovering him; but lost the afternoon to no purpose, as we did not see him again. Astronomical observations placed us in longitude  $100^{\circ} 05' 47''$ , latitude  $40^{\circ} 49' 55''$ .

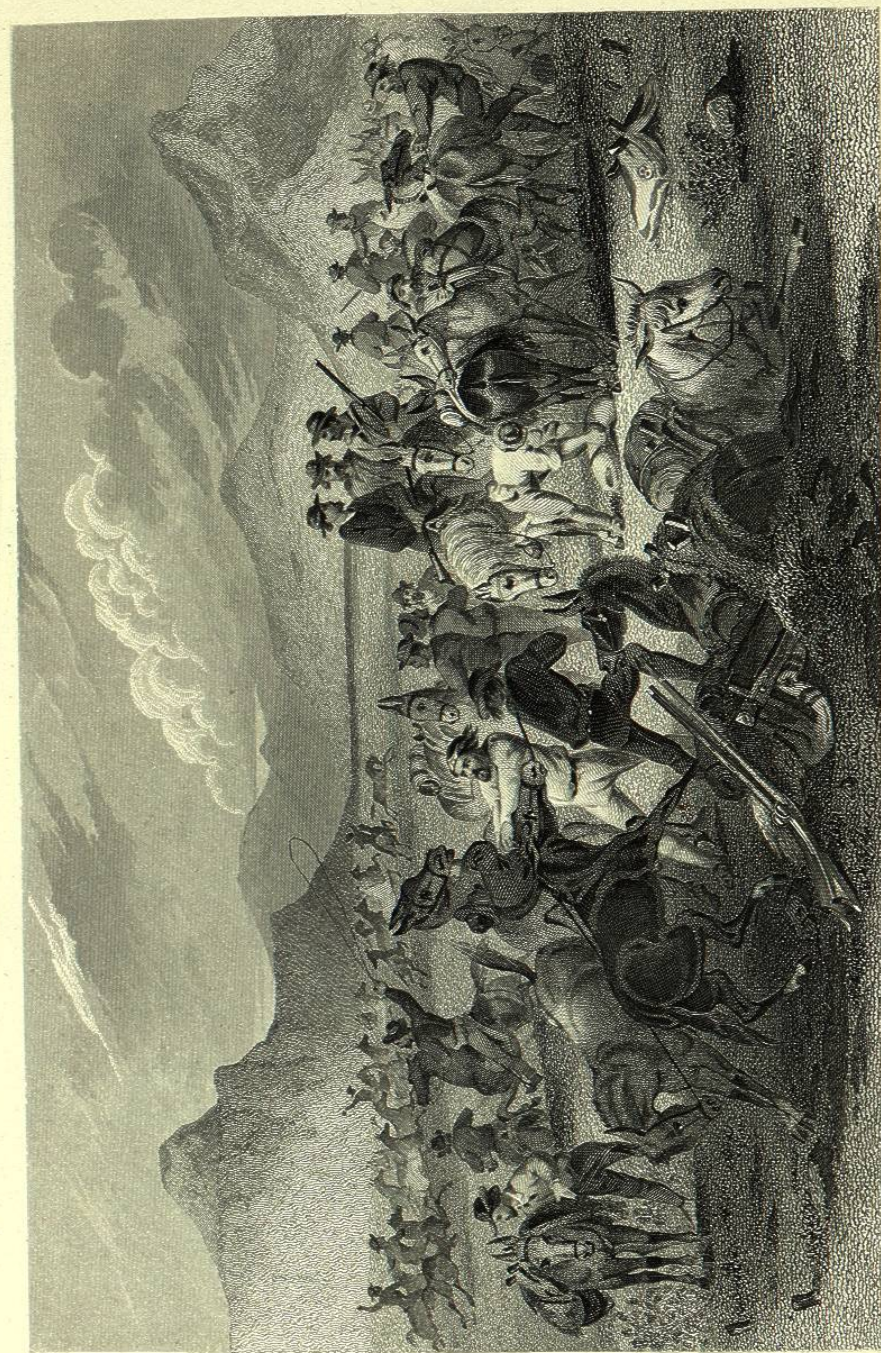
July 1st.—Along our road to-day the prairie-bottom was more elevated and dry, and the hills which border the right side of the river higher and more broken and picturesque in the outline. The country, too, was better timbered. As we were riding quietly along the bank a grand herd of buffalo, some seven or eight hundred in number, came crowding up from the river, where they had been to drink, and commenced crossing the plain slowly, eating as they went. The wind was favorable; the coolness of the morning invited to exercise; the ground was apparently good, and the distance across the prairie (two or three miles) gave us a fine opportunity to charge them before they could get among the river-hills. It was too fine a prospect for a chase to be lost; and, halting for a few moments, the hunters were brought up and saddled, and Kit Carson, Maxwell, and I started together. They were now somewhat less than half a mile distant, and we rode easily along until within about three hundred yards, when a sudden agitation, a wavering in the band, and a galloping to and fro of some which were scattered along the skirts, gave us the intimation that we were discovered. We started together at a hand-gallop, riding steadily abreast of each other, and here the interest of the chase became so en-



grossingly intense that we were sensible to nothing else. We were now closing upon them rapidly, and the front of the mass was already in rapid motion for the hills, and in a few seconds the movement had communicated itself to the whole herd.

A crowd of bulls, as usual, brought up the rear, and every now and then some of them faced about, and then dashed on after the band a short distance, and turned and looked again, as if more than half inclined to stand and fight. In a few moments, however, during which we had been quickening our pace, the rout was universal, and we were going over the ground like a hurricane. When at about thirty yards, we gave the usual shout (the hunter's *pas de charge*) and broke into the herd. We entered on the side, the mass giving way in every direction in their heedless course. Many of the bulls, less active and less fleet than the cows, paying no attention to the ground, and occupied solely with the hunter, were precipitated to the earth with great force, rolling over and over with the violence of the shock, and hardly distinguishable in the dust. We separated on entering, each singling out his game.

My horse was a trained hunter, famous in the West under the name of Proveau, and, with his eyes flashing and the foam flying from his mouth, sprang on after the cow like a tiger. In a few moments he brought me alongside of her, and, rising in the stirrups, I fired at the distance of a yard, the ball entering at the termination of the long hair, and passing near the heart. She fell headlong at the report of the gun, and checking my horse, I looked around for my companions. At a little distance Kit was on the ground, engaged in tying his horse to the horns of a cow which he was preparing to cut up. Among the scattered bands, at some distance below, I caught a glimpse of Maxwell; and while I was looking a light wreath of white smoke curled away from his gun, from which I was too far to hear the report. Nearer, and between me and the hills toward which they were directing their course, was the body of the herd, and giving my horse the rein we dashed after them. A thick cloud of dust hung upon their rear, which filled my mouth and eyes and nearly smothered me. In the midst of this I could see nothing, and the buffalo were not distinguishable until within thirty feet. They crowded together more densely still as I came upon them, and rushed along in such a compact body that I could not obtain an entrance—the horse almost leaping upon them. In a few moments the mass divided to the right and left, the horns clattering with a noise heard above everything else, and my horse darted into the opening. Five or six bulls charged on us as we dashed along the line, but were left far behind; and, singling out a cow, I gave her my fire, but struck too high. She gave a tremendous leap, and scoured on swifter than before. I reined up my horse, and the band swept on like a torrent,



MOVING CAMP.



leaving the place quiet and clear. Our chase had led us into dangerous ground. A prairie-dog village, so thickly settled that there were three or four holes in every twenty yards square, occupied the whole bottom for nearly two miles in length. Looking around, I saw only one of the hunters, nearly out of sight, and the long dark line of our caravan crawling along, three or four miles distant. After a march of twenty-four miles, we encamped at nightfall one mile and a half above the lower end of Brady's Island. The breadth of this arm of the river was eight hundred and eighty yards, and the water nowhere two feet in depth. The island bears the name of a man killed on this spot some years ago. His party had encamped here, three in company, and one of the number went off to hunt, leaving Brady and his companion together. These two had frequently quarrelled, and on the hunter's return he found Brady dead, and was told that he had shot himself accidentally. He was buried here on the bank; but, as usual, the wolves had torn him out, and some human bones that were lying on the ground we supposed were his. Troops of wolves that were hanging on the skirts of the buffalo kept up an uninterrupted howling during the night, venturing almost into camp. In the morning they were sitting at a short distance, barking, and impatiently waiting our departure to fall upon the bones.

July 2d.—The morning was cool and smoky. Our road led closer to the hills, which here increased in elevation, presenting an outline of conical peaks three hundred to five hundred feet high. Some timber, apparently pine, grow in the ravines, and streaks of clay or sand whiten their slopes. We crossed during the morning a number of hollows, timbered principally with box elder (*acer negundo*), poplar, and elm. Brady's Island is well wooded, and all the river along which our road led to-day may, in general, be called tolerably well timbered. We passed near an encampment of the Oregon emigrants, where they appear to have reposed several days. A variety of household articles were scattered about, and they had probably disburdened themselves here of many things not absolutely necessary. I had left the usual road before the mid-day halt, and in the afternoon, having sent several men in advance to reconnoitre, marched directly for the mouth of the South Fork. On our arrival, the horsemen were sent in and scattered about the river to search the best fording-places, and the carts followed immediately. The stream is here divided by an island into two channels. The southern is four hundred and fifty feet wide, having eighteen or twenty inches water in the deepest places. With the exception of a few dry bars, the bed of the river is generally quicksands, in which the carts began to sink rapidly so soon as the mules halted, so that it was necessary to keep them constantly in motion.

The northern channel, two thousand two hundred and fifty feet wide,



was somewhat deeper, having frequently three feet of water in the numerous small channels, with a bed of coarse gravel. The whole breadth of the Nebraska, immediately below the junction, is five thousand three hundred and fifty feet. All our equipage had reached the left bank safely at six o'clock, having to-day made twenty miles. We encamped at the point of land immediately at the junction of the North and South Forks. Between the streams is a low rich prairie, extending from their confluence eighteen miles westwardly to the bordering hills, where it is five and a half miles wide. It is covered with a luxuriant growth of grass, and along the banks is a slight and scattered fringe of cottonwood and willow. In the buffalo trails and wallows I remarked saline efflorescences, to which a rapid evaporation in the great heat of the sun probably contributes, as the soil is entirely unprotected by timber. In the vicinity of these places there was a bluish grass, which the cattle refuse to eat, called by the voyageurs "*herbe salée*" (salt grass). The latitude of the junction is  $40^{\circ} 04' 47''$ , and longitude, by chronometer and lunar distances,  $100^{\circ} 49' 43''$ . The elevation above the sea is about two thousand seven hundred feet. The hunters came in with a fat cow; and, as we had labored hard, we enjoyed well a supper of roasted ribs and *boudins*, the *chef d'œuvre* of a prairie-cook. Mosquitoes thronged about us this evening; but, by ten o'clock, when the thermometer had fallen to  $47^{\circ}$ , they had all disappeared.

*July 3d.*—As this was to be a point in our homeward journey, I made a *cache* (a term used in all this country for what is hidden in the ground) of a barrel of pork. It was impossible to conceal such a proceeding from the sharp eyes of our Cheyenne companions, and I therefore told them to go and see what it was they were burying. They would otherwise have not failed to return and destroy our *cache*, in expectation of some rich booty; but pork they dislike, and never eat. We left our camp at nine, continuing up the South Fork, the prairie-bottom affording us a fair road; but in the long grass we roused myriads of mosquitoes and flies, from which our horses suffered severely. The day was smoky, with a pleasant breeze from the south, and the plains on the opposite side were covered with buffalo. Having travelled twenty-five miles, we encamped at six in the evening; and the men were sent across the river for wood, as there is none here on the left bank. Our fires were partially made of the *bois de vache*, the dry excrement of the buffalo, which, like that of the camel in the Arabian deserts, furnishes to the traveller a very good substitute for wood, burning like turf. Wolves in great numbers surrounded us during the night, crossing and recrossing from the opposite herds to our camp, and howling and trotting about in the river until morning.

*July 4th.*—The morning was very smoky, the sun shining dimly and red, as in a thick fog. The camp was roused with a salute at daybreak,

and from our scanty store a portion of what our Indian friends called the "red fire-water" served out to the men. While we were at breakfast a buffalo calf broke through the camp, followed by a couple of wolves. In its fright it had probably mistaken us for a band of buffalo. The wolves were obliged to make a circuit around the camp, so that the calf got a little the start, and strained every nerve to reach a large herd at the foot of the hills, about two miles distant; but first one, and then another, and another wolf joined in the chase, until its pursuers amounted to twenty or thirty, and they ran him down before he could reach his friends. There were a few bulls near the place, and one of them attacked the wolves and tried to rescue him; but was driven off immediately, and the little animal fell an easy prey, half devoured before he was dead. We watched the chase with the interest always felt for the weak; and had there been a saddled horse at hand, he would have fared better. Leaving camp, our road soon approached the hills, in which strata of a marl like that of the Chimney Rock, hereafter described, make their appearance. It is probably of this rock that the hills on the right bank of the Platte, a little below the junction, are composed, and which are worked by the winds and rains into sharp peaks and cones, giving them, in contrast to the surrounding level region, something of a picturesque appearance. We crossed this morning numerous beds of the small creeks which, in the time of rains and melting snow, pour down from the ridge, bringing down with them always great quantities of sand and gravel, which have gradually raised their beds four to ten feet above the level of the prairie which they cross, making each one of them a miniature Po. Raised in this way above the surrounding prairie, without any bank, the long yellow and winding line of their beds resembles a causeway from the hills to the river. Many spots on the prairie are yellow with sunflower (*helianthus*).

As we were riding slowly along this afternoon, clouds of dust in the ravines, among the hills to the right, suddenly attracted our attention, and in a few minutes column after column of buffalo came galloping down, making directly to the river. By the time the leading herds had reached the water the prairie was darkened with the dense masses. Immediately before us, when the bands first came down into the valley, stretched an unbroken line, the head of which was lost among the river-hills on the opposite side; and still they poured down from the ridge on our right. From hill to hill, the prairie-bottom was certainly not less than two miles wide; and, allowing the animals to be ten feet apart, and only ten in a line, there were already eleven thousand in view. Some idea may thus be formed of their number when they had occupied the whole plain. In a short time they surrounded us on every side, extending for several miles in the rear, and forward as far as the eye could reach; leaving around us,