

South Fork of the Platte; as which it is laid down on the map. But descending it only through a portion of its course, we have not been able to settle this point satisfactorily.

In the evening a band of buffalo furnished a little excitement, by charging through the camp.

On the following day we descended the stream by an excellent buffalo trail, along the open grassy bottom of the river. On our right the bayou was bordered by a mountainous range, crested with rocky and naked peaks; and below it had a beautiful park-like character of pretty level prairies, interspersed among low spurs, wooded openly with pine and quaking asp, contrasting well with the denser pines which swept around on the mountain sides.

Descending always the valley of the stream, toward noon we descried a mounted party descending the point of a spur, and, judging them to be Arapahoes—who, defeated or victorious, were equally dangerous to us, and with whom a fight would be inevitable—we hurried to post ourselves as strongly as possible on some willow-islands in the river. We had scarcely halted when they arrived, proving to be a party of Utah women, who told us that on the other side of the ridge their village was fighting with the Arapahoes. As soon as they had given us this information they filled the air with cries and lamentations, which made us understand that some of their chiefs had been killed.

Extending along the river, directly ahead of us, was a low piny ridge, leaving between it and the stream a small open bottom, on which the Utahs had very injudiciously placed their village, which, according to the women, numbered about three hundred warriors. Advancing in the cover of the pines, the Arapahoes, about daylight, charged into the village, driving off a great number of their horses, and killing four men; among them the principal chief of the village. They drove the horses perhaps a mile beyond the village, to the end of a hollow, where they had previously fortified at the edge of the pines. Here the Utahs had instantly attacked them in turn, and, according to the report of the women, were getting rather the best of the day. The women pressed us eagerly to join with their people, and would immediately have provided us with the best horses at the village; but it was not for us to interfere in such a conflict. Neither party were our friends, or under our protection; and each was ready to prey upon us that could. But we could not help feeling an unusual excitement at being within a few hundred yards of a fight in which five hundred men were closely engaged, and hearing the sharp cracks of their rifles. We were in a bad position, and subject to be attacked in it. Either party which we might meet, victorious or defeated, was certain to fall upon us; and, gearing up immediately, we kept close along the pines of the ridge, having

it between us and the village, and keeping the scouts on the summit, to give us notice of the approach of Indians. As we passed by the village, which was immediately below us, horsemen were galloping to and fro, and groups of people were gathered around those who were wounded and dead, and who were being brought in from the field. We continued to press on, and, crossing another fork, which came in from the right, after having made fifteen miles from the village, fortified ourselves strongly in the pines, a short distance from the river.

During the afternoon Pike's Peak had been plainly in view before us, and, from our encampment, bore north 87° east by compass. This was a familiar object, and it had for us the face of an old friend. At its foot were the springs, where we had spent a pleasant day in coming out. Near it were the habitations of civilized men; and it overlooked the broad, smooth plains, which promised us an easy journey to our home.

The next day we left the river, which continued its course toward Pike's Peak; and, taking a southeasterly direction, in about ten miles we crossed a gentle ridge, and, issuing from the South Park, found ourselves involved among the broken spurs of the mountains which border the great prairie plains. Although broken and extremely rugged, the country was very interesting, being well watered by numerous affluents to the Arkansas River, and covered with grass and a variety of trees. The streams which, in the upper part of their course, ran through grassy and open hollows, after a few miles all descended into deep and impracticable cañons, through which they found their way to the Arkansas Valley. Here the buffalo trails we had followed were dispersed among the hills, or crossed over into the more open valleys of other streams.

During the day our road was fatiguing and difficult, reminding us much, by its steep and rocky character, of our travelling the year before among the Wind River Mountains; but always at night we found some grassy bottom, which afforded us a pleasant camp. In the deep seclusion of these little streams we found always an abundant pasturage and a wild luxuriance of plants and trees. Aspens and pines were the prevailing timber; on the creeks oak was frequent; but the narrow-leaved cotton-wood (*Populus angustifolia*), of unusually large size, and seven or eight feet in diameter, was the principal tree. With these were mingled a variety of shrubby trees, which aided to make the ravines almost impenetrable.

After several days' laborious travelling we succeeded in extricating ourselves from the mountains, and on the morning of the 28th encamped immediately at their foot, on a handsome tributary to the Arkansas River. In the afternoon we descended the stream, winding our way along the bottoms, which were densely wooded with oak, and in the evening encamped near the main river.

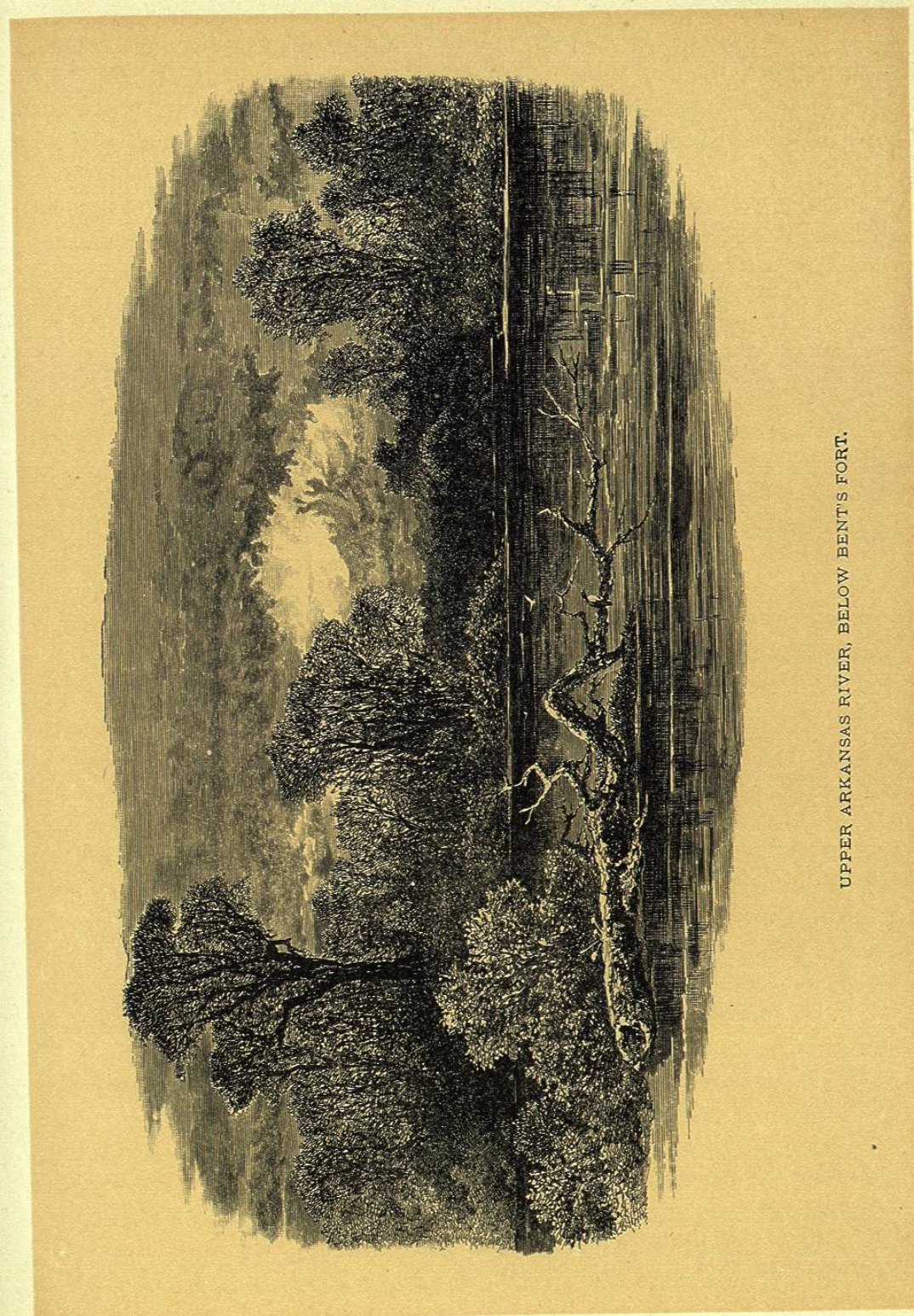
Continuing the next day our road along the Arkansas, and meeting on the way a war party of Arapahoe Indians (who had recently been committing some outrages at Bent's Fort, killing stock and driving off horses), we arrived before sunset at the *pueblo* near the mouth of the *Fontaine-qui-bouit* River, where we had the pleasure to find a number of our old acquaintances. The little settlement appeared in a thriving condition; and in the interval of our absence another had been established on the river, some thirty miles above.

June 30th.—Our cavalcade moved rapidly down the Arkansas, along the broad road which follows the river, and on July 1st we arrived at Bent's Fort, about seventy miles below the mouth of the *Fontaine-qui-bouit*.

As we emerged into view from the groves on the river, we were saluted with a display of the national flag and repeated discharges from the guns of the fort, where we were received by Mr. George Bent with a cordial welcome and a friendly hospitality, in the enjoyment of which we spent several very agreeable days. We were now in the region where our mountaineers were accustomed to live; and all the dangers and difficulties of the road being considered past, four of them, including Carson and Walker, remained at the fort.

On the 5th we resumed our journey down the Arkansas, travelling along a broad wagon road, and encamped about twenty miles below the fort. On the way we met a very large village of Sioux and Cheyenne Indians, who, with the Arapahoes, were returning from the crossing of the Arkansas, where they had been to meet the Kioway and Comanche Indians. A few days previous they had massacred a party of fifteen Delawares, whom they had discovered in a fort on the Smoky Hill River, losing in the affair several of their own people. They were desirous that we should bear a pacific message to the Delawares on the frontier, from whom they expected retaliation; and we passed through them without any difficulty or delay. Dispersed over the plain, in scattered bodies of horsemen and family groups of women and children, with dog-trains carrying baggage, and long lines of pack-horses, their appearance was picturesque and imposing.

I left, at this encampment, the Arkansas River, taking a northeasterly direction across the elevated dividing grounds which separate that river from the waters of the Platte. On the 7th we crossed a large stream about forty yards wide, and one or two feet deep, flowing with a lively current on a sandy bed. The discolored and muddy appearance of the water indicated that it proceeded from recent rains; and we are inclined to consider this a branch of the Smoky Hill River, although, possibly, it may be the Pawnee Fork of the Arkansas. Beyond this stream we travelled over high and level prairies, halting at small ponds and holes of



UPPER ARKANSAS RIVER, BELOW BENT'S FORT.

water, and using for our fires the *bois de vache*, the country being without timber. On the evening of the 8th we encamped in a cotton-wood grove on the banks of a sandy stream-bed, where there was water in holes sufficient for the camp. Here several hollows, or dry creeks with sandy beds, met together, forming the head of a stream which afterward proved to be the Smoky Hill Fork of the Kansas River.

The next morning, as we were leaving our encampment, a number of Arapahoe Indians were discovered. They belonged to a war party which had scattered over the prairie in returning from an expedition against the Pawnees.

As we travelled down the valley, water gathered rapidly in the sandy bed from many little tributaries; and at evening it had become a handsome stream, fifty to eighty feet in width, with a lively current in small channels, the water being principally dispersed among quicksands.

Gradually enlarging, in a few days' march it became a river eighty yards in breadth, wooded with occasional groves of cotton-wood. Our road was generally over level uplands bordering the river, which were closely covered with a sward of buffalo grass.

On the 10th we entered again the buffalo range, where we had found these animals so abundant on our outward journey, and halted for a day among numerous herds, in order to make a provision of meat sufficient to carry us to the frontier.

A few days afterward we encamped, in a pleasant evening, on a high river prairie, the stream being less than a hundred yards broad. During the night we had a succession of thunder-storms, with heavy and continuous rain, and toward morning the water suddenly burst over the banks, flooding the bottoms, and becoming a large river five or six hundred yards in breadth. The darkness of the night and incessant rain had concealed from the guard the rise of the water; and the river broke into the camp so suddenly, that the baggage was instantly covered, and all our perishable collections almost entirely ruined, and the hard labor of many months destroyed in a moment.

On the 17th we discovered a large village of Indians encamped at the mouth of a handsomely wooded stream on the right bank of the river. Readily inferring, from the nature of the encampment, that they were Pawnee Indians, and confidently expecting good treatment from a people who receive regularly an annuity from the Government, we proceeded directly to the village, where we found assembled nearly all the Pawnee tribe, who were now returning from the crossing of the Arkansas, where they had met the Kioway and Comanche Indians. We were received by them with the unfriendly rudeness and characteristic insolence which they never fail to display whenever they find an occasion for doing so with impunity.