

quietly followed in the wake of the vicious animal, picking up the fragments scattered along, completed a picture which would have made the fortune of Cruickshank had he been on the spot to take it down. Some time after this adventure the Indians stole the horse, but they made a bad bargain of it

CHAPTER VI.

The Valley of Cedral Creek. — Singular Natural Road. — Another Delay. — Arrival of General McLeod with additional Cattle. — The March resumed. — Bad Travelling. — Delicious Spring of Water. — Valley of the Brazos. — Fondness of our Animals for its Waters. — Crossing the Brazos. — Prairie on Fire. — Out of Water again. — Sufferings of Man and Beast. — A cool Spring discovered. — Natural Bathing-tub. — Fresh Indian "Sign." — A recently-deserted Village. — Trick of a Wag. — The Camanche Peak. — "Seeing the Elephant." — The "Cross Timbers." — Description of this singular Forest. — Arrival at Noland's River. — Destruction of our Tents. — The crossing of Noland's River. — Deserted Indian Village. — Latitude and Longitude taken. — In the Midst of our Troubles. — Our last Day in the "Cross Timbers." — A gloomy Night. — Once more upon the open Prairie. — A hearty Meal. — Speculations as to the Route we had taken. — The Banks of Red River supposed to be visible.

ON the evening of the 6th of July, the day after the *stampede* mentioned in the preceding chapter, we encamped in a rich and beautiful valley through which Cedral Creek meandered. Our descent into this valley was down the sides of a steep hill, and by a road so perfect that it seems almost impossible nature had any hand in making it. From the top we had a fine view of the romantic valley far below us, which was studded here and there with clumps of trees, while in the distance a dim outline of mountains and the wooded bottoms of the Brazos relieved the eye.

At first it was thought impossible to get the wagons

down the steep declivity, but the spies soon found that there was a regular road winding down the sides, and by means of this we descended with ease and safety. For some two miles there was every appearance of a regular excavation on the upper, and of an embankment thrown up on the lower side of the hill; and if this road, upon which there was little vegetation, is really the work of nature, it may be put down as one of her strangest doings. Had it not been accidentally discovered we should not have made the descent without great labour, if at all.

Some of the wagons needing repairs, and our present encampment affording every facility for that purpose, it was resolved to remain here until General McLeod should arrive, and with him the additional cattle for our subsistence. On the afternoon of the 8th we were all overjoyed to see the expected party winding their way down the singular natural road which we had travelled two days previous. General McLeod now resumed the command, and ordered us to make every preparation for an early start on the following morning. Our course, up to this time, had been north, varying a little to the east, perhaps, as the broken and hilly country intervened. The object of Mr. Howland, our guide, was to cross the Brazos at the nearest practicable point, and follow up between the waters of that stream and the Trinity.

After travelling some sixteen miles on the 9th, to gain certainly not more than half that distance, we were fortunate in reaching a small spring of water. Our progress had been considerably impeded and made devious and tiresome by deep gullies and runs. The ensuing night we encamped upon the banks of a small creek of fresh water, emptying into the Brazos. This

latter stream was now but a few miles to our right, its rich and fertile bottoms, flanked by a heavy growth of timber, being plainly visible.

Our route, on the 11th of July, was along a chain of rough hills which separate the valley of the Brazos from the prairies. During the day, several wagons were in some way broken and injured, and it was only after a tedious and toilsome march that we were enabled to reach a cool and delicious spring of water, and find good pasturage for our jaded horses and oxen. Here we found grass in great abundance, and as many of the wagons were again in need of repairs, we remained until the 14th.

The location upon which we were encamped, being in the edge of the timber, with rich prairie directly in front of us, was one of the finest we had yet met on our route. The valley of the Brazos at this place abounded with every species of timber known in Texas; grapes, plums, and other fruit were found in profusion; honey could be obtained in almost every hollow tree; trout and other fish were plentiful in the small creeks in the neighbourhood, and the woods and prairies about us not only afforded excellent grazing for our cattle and horses, but teemed with every species of game—elk, deer, bears, wild turkeys, and, at the proper season, buffalo and mustang. No fresh Indian "sign" was discovered, but the year previous a large body of Cherokees or Wacoes had evidently made the neighbourhood their home, old tent poles being found still standing near our camping-ground, as well as corn-fields which had been cultivated the year before.

As I have said, we were encamped by a cool and delicious spring of never-failing water. Some half a mile distant, in an eastern direction, the Brazos mean-

dered along, whose salt and brackish waters, although unpalatable for man, were swallowed with avidity by both horses and cattle. Indeed, so fond were the latter of this water that they drank incredible quantities of it, and could hardly be induced to leave the stream the first time they were taken to it. At certain periods of the year the prairie Indians visit the salt streams of Texas, considering the waters highly beneficial to their stock.

We crossed the stream on the 14th, after much difficulty from the quicksands and high banks. The wagons all over, we stopped for an hour or two under the shade of some oaks that skirted the border of the valley, and here, for the first time, I saw the magnificent spectacle of a prairie on fire. It was purely accidental, and caused us little damage; but had the wind been in a different direction it would have swept the whole face of the country for miles and miles in advance. The dry grass flashed up like powder, and the fire spread over the prairie with alarming speed. At first an attempt was made to extinguish it, by means of switches made of green boughs and bushes; but those who exerted themselves in this way returned from the task with singed whiskers, eyebrows, and hair, and without having effected anything.

We pursued our journey in the afternoon, and reached a mud-hole—for it could not be called anything else—where we encamped. All night the long and bright line of fire, which was sweeping across the prairie to our left, was plainly seen, and the next morning it was climbing the narrow chain of low hills which divided the prairie from the bottoms of the Brazos.

With a single exception of one day and night, we had suffered little from want of water up to the 15th of

July. After a tortuous and tedious march, over a dry prairie ridge, we were finally obliged to encamp without water. Of course we suffered most intolerably ourselves, after having travelled all day in a hot sun; but the cattle and horses felt it even more seriously. At night the guard found great difficulty in herding and keeping them together, so anxious were they to start off in search of water, and the next morning the horses had a wild expression about the eyes, combined with an uneasiness and fretfulness, which forcibly told their suffering.

Our start in the morning was early, and eagerly did we press forward with the hope of finding water. No breakfast had been cooked, as eating only tended to increase a thirst which was already distressing. Late in the afternoon, and when we had almost despaired of finding water, one of the spies returned with the joyful intelligence that a large and cool spring had been discovered but a little way off our course. The line of march was now instantly broken; for those who had good horses dashed madly forward, while the drivers bestowed heavy blows, and imprecations if possible more horrible than ever, upon their tired cattle, to press them onward. In small straggling parties we reached the goal of our hopes. A ledge of rocks, from which cool and limpid water was gushing in all directions, formed the head of the spring, and a few yards below the different branches fell into a common basin some twenty yards in width, and filled to the depth of eight or ten feet with the transparent element. A purling stream was here formed, which carried the surplus waters of the beautiful reservoir to mingle with the brackish current of the Brazos—a base and most unnatural union.

Our thirst was slaked at the very fountain-head—the basin was converted into an immense bathing-tub, where all hands enjoyed the invigorating luxury of a bath. My ankle was still much swollen, and so sore that I was unable to use it in the least; but I made out to hobble to the basin on one foot, and gained great strength by lying at the edge and allowing one of the cool streams from above to fall upon the lame part. The next morning, after enjoying another bath, we left this delicious spring with regret, and pursued our journey with no prospect of water before us. We were fortunate enough, however, to reach a small branch of running water at nightfall, upon which we encamped.

Our camp was hardly formed before Captain Caldwell, or "Old Paint,"* as he was generally called, returned with the spy company, and reported that he had fallen in with an Indian camp which apparently had been deserted but a few hours. The duties of the spy company, I might here add, were to keep one day in advance of the main body, for the purpose of picking out the best road for the wagons, finding water, and keeping a look-out for Indians. Captain C. brought in a number of roasting ears, and stated that he found many unripe melons and pumpkins among the corn.

* Captain Caldwell received the *soubriquet* of "Old Paint," from the fact of his naturally dark hair, whiskers, and beard being covered with large white spots. In Texas, and some of our Southern States, a horse or other animal which is spotted is called a "paint." Captain C. was an old backwoodsman, had been engaged in conflicts almost innumerable with the Mexicans and Indians, and was what is termed in Texas an excellent "rough fighter" and hunter. He was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence of Texas, and many of his daring achievements are often recounted in that country. He was released, with the other Texan prisoners, and returned to his family at Gonzales; but on the invasion of Texas in 1842, by General Woll, he recruited a company and defeated that officer at the Salado. The following winter he died, much regretted by all who knew him.

While on Little River, a report had been sent to General McLeod that a large party of Cherokees, Caddoes, and individuals of other tribes, all hostile to Texas, had planted themselves in a large and fertile bend of the Brazos above the Camanche Peak, and that they had extensive and well-cultivated fields, besides a large number of horses and mules. At first it was determined to go somewhat out of our way and attack this party in their stronghold, for it was said that they were well fortified; but upon after thought it was feared the detention would be too great, and the adventure was given up. It was now evident enough that we were in the vicinity of these hostiles, and at night strict orders were given the guard to be on the alert to prevent a surprise, or our horses and oxen from being *stampeded* and driven off.

The next day we made but five or six miles on our journey, and encamped near several mineral springs, the waters of which were strongly impregnated with iron and sulphur. The skull of a white woman, but recently killed, was found in the vicinity, and large and fresh Indian trails were discovered running in the direction of the Brazos. We also passed through a recently-deserted Indian camp upon the march, the bark wigwams still standing, and many of the implements generally seen in an Indian village remaining precisely as the frightened inhabitants had left them.

Some ingenious wag had left our camp early in the morning, alone, and happened to be the first to discover this village. The fellow played off a fine trick upon some of us in the manner following: the interiors of some of the wigwams were lined with smooth bark, and choosing one of the larger domiciles, he covered the bark with rough but tolerably well-drawn figures of

men, horses, and buffalo. He must have been a rapid sketcher, as the entire ceiling, if I may so call it, was in this way decorated. Underneath a group of figures stood out, in bold relief and in good Roman characters, the crack-jaw name of some Indian brave, leading us to suppose, at once, that this was the artist who had executed the work above. Not suspecting, for a moment, that any such hoax had been played, and never imagining that any of our men had gone ahead and alone, we could not but come to the conclusion that some erratic white genius had domesticated himself among the Indians, or that one of the wild sons of the woods and the prairies had cultivated, in some way, a taste for the fine arts. The author of the hoax, however, thinking the joke too good to be lost, finally divulged the secret.

Our next day's march was along the high ridge of prairies which divides the waters of what was thought to be Noland's River from those of the Brazos. The prospect on both sides was romantic in a high degree. To the east, for miles, the prairie gently sloped, hardly presenting a bush to relieve the eye. In the distance, the green skirting of woods, which fringed either border of a large stream, softened down the view. Occasionally a deer would jump suddenly from his noon-day rest, and scamper off across the prairie, but other than this no game was seen. The few deer we saw were exceedingly wild, from the fact of there being so many Indians in the vicinity; while the buffalo had evidently all been driven to the south.

To the west of the ridge, the immediate vicinity was even more desolate, but the fertile bottoms of the Brazos, with their luxuriant growth of timber, were still visible, and the Camanche Peak, rising high above the other hills, gave grandeur and sublimity to a scene which

would otherwise have been far from monotonous. This peak is celebrated as a looking-out point for the Camanches, commanding, as it does, a complete view of the country around as far as the eye can reach—and hence its name.

Late in the afternoon we reached a small spring of water where we encamped, and the grass being excellent in the vicinity, we remained nearly all the next day to rest the jaded cattle and repair the rickety wagons. Many of the latter were half worn out when we started, and the rough road over which we had travelled was far from improving them. An afternoon's march brought us to a noble spring in a grove of post oaks—a grove which turned out to be one of the outskirts of the celebrated Cross Timbers.

Up to the 21st of July, one month from the time when we left the Brushy, our course had been nearly north, the country we traversed principally fertile and rolling prairies, destitute of timber except the bottoms of the different streams we had crossed. Our road, in the mean time, although we had considered it very bad, was a perfect macadamized turnpike in comparison with what we were shortly to meet. There is a cant expression, "*I've seen the elephant*," in very common use in Texas, although I had never heard it until we entered the Cross Timbers, or rather the first evening after we had encamped in that noted strip of forest land. I had already seen "sights" of almost every kind, animals of almost every species, reptiles until I was more than satisfied with the number and variety, and felt ready and willing to believe almost anything I might hear as to what I was yet to see; but I knew very well that we were not in an elephant range, and when I first heard one of our men say that he had seen the animal in ques-

tion, I was utterly at a loss to fathom his meaning. I knew that the phrase had some conventional signification, but farther I was ignorant. A youngster, however, was "caught" by the expression, and quite a laugh was raised around a camp fire at his expense.

A small party of us were half sitting, half reclining around some blazing fagots, telling stories of the past and speculating upon our prospects for the future, when an old member of the spy company entered our circle and quietly took a seat upon the ground. After a long breath, and a preparatory clearing of his throat, the veteran hunter exclaimed, "Well, I've seen the elephant."

"The *what*?" said a youngster close by, partially turning round so as to get a view of the speaker's face, and then giving him a look which was made up in equal parts of incredulity and inquiry.

"I've seen the elephant," coolly replied the old campaigner.

"But not a real, sure-enough elephant, have you?" queried the younger speaker, with that look and tone which indicate the existence of a doubt and the wish to have it promptly and plainly removed.

This was too much; for all within hearing, many of whom understood and could fully appreciate the joke, burst out in an inordinate fit of laughter as they saw how easily the young man had walked into a trap, which, although not set for that purpose, had fairly caught him; and I, too, joined in the merry outbreak, yet in all frankness I must say that I did not fully understand what I was laughing at. The meaning of the expression I will explain. When a man is disappointed in anything he undertakes, when he has seen enough, when he gets sick and tired of any job he may have set