

wards him as fast as my lameness would permit. He turned and scampered off after his comrades. By a fair mathematical calculation the animal went at least twenty yards while I went one; yet I continued the pursuit with the hope that his race would soon be run. Until his broad, white tail was lost in the dim twilight of evening did I press forward, and only gave up the chase when I could see nothing to pursue.

Thus ends a long but veritable account of an adventure with a herd of deer on the Western prairies. To account for their exceeding tameness and approachability, I can offer no other solution than that they had never before met either the white or red man. The narrow space of country which afforded them food was bounded by sterile wastes, and their natural enemies, the red men, had never visited their peaceful dell.

I slowly picked my way back to camp, out of humour and out of conceit with myself, my rifle, my powder, and more especially my bullets. On reaching my comrades, I ascertained that Tom Hancock had shot three noble bucks, and had gone out some time after me. Nothing, he said, save the want of light, had prevented him from killing twenty. I was asked if I had seen any deer. I merely remarked that I had seen several, and here the conversation dropped. I was not disposed to be communicative.

And what, the reader will probably ask, was the reason of my want of success? In all frankness, and with a desire to answer his question fairly, and to the best of my knowledge, belief, and ability, I will here state that there is a very common disease prevalent among young and inexperienced hunters in Texas, which is known as the "*buck ague*." It manifests itself whenever the subject is suddenly brought in close proximity with game of

the larger class, and more difficult to kill, and its effects are to give a hurriedness of action, a tremulousness of the nerves, and an unwonted excitableness to the feelings generally. It strikes me forcibly, and I have little doubt the reader's impressions are closely akin to mine, that I underwent a severe attack of the "*buck ague*" while on the little hunting excursion of which I have just given a description—in plain English, that I was too nervous even to hit a barn door at twenty steps.

CHAPTER IX.

Brackish Water.—Los Cuervos, or The Crows.—Carlos and his Speculations.—Stream on our Left visited.—Opinion of "Old Paint."—Startling Surmises.—No Water.—Endurance of the Mule.—Singular Valley.—Water seen in the Distance.—Perilous Descent of a Bluff.—Arrival at the River.—More Brackish Water.—An Alarm.—Fire in Camp.—Terrific Spread of the Flames.—Explosion of Cartridges.—Night Ascent of the Bluffs.—Ravages of the Fire.—Extent of our Loss.—Magnificent night Scene.—Our Camp by Daylight.—Coffee too much burned.—Compelled to fall back upon First Principles.—Again on the March.—Intolerable Suffering from Thirst.—A Beautiful Camp.—Disappearance of Carlos and Brignoli.—Horrors of our Situation.—Lost, and without a Guide upon the Prairies.—Shower on the Espy Principle.—Party sent out to Explore.—Rough Travelling.—Gloomy Prospects.—Return to Camp.—Ten Miles for a Draught of Water.—"Doing" our Washing.—Company of Spies sent out.—Death of Doctor Brashear.—Bitter Water.—Rations reduced.—Sufferings now commencing.—Return of one of the Spies.—Again on the March.—Visit to a Commonwealth of Prairie Dogs.—Description of these singular Animals.

THE 13th of August was an eventful day with us—one which few of the party can ever forget. The night previous we encamped without water for our cattle or horses, and the little we obtained for our own use was of the worst quality, and swallowed only to allay the intolerable thirst brought on by a long day's march under the hot sun. The hard buffalo chase had jaded my

horse severely, and at such a time I well knew he needed water more than ever; but not a drop could I procure for him.

We had proceeded but a short distance, on the morning of the 13th, before the blue tops of several mountains were seen, far in the distance to the west. Carlos was the first to discover them, and remarked that they were *Los Cuervos*, or *The Crows*, three high mountains in the chain through which the supposed Red River has cut its way. The place where the stream winds its course through the mountains is called the *Angosturas*, or *Narrows*, and *The Crows* stand out in bold relief to guide the distant traveller to that point.

Our route, at the present time, was along a high prairie which appeared to be a dividing ridge between two large streams. During the morning, Captain Caldwell visited the stream which my companion and I had discovered the day previous, while chasing the buffalo. On returning, about noon, he said that the stream was a large one, and that he believed it to be the *Brazos*! This river was supposed by all to be a long distance to the south. Captain C. also, for the first time, declared his conviction that the stream we had been following up from the Waco village was the *Wichita*, and that the Red River was some seventy-five or a hundred miles to the north. All were startled at this report; but still, so strong was the reliance placed in the assertions of Carlos, few could be induced to give it credit.

We continued our journey until the middle of the afternoon, altering our course somewhat to the north to avoid the bad travelling we found more immediately on our route. Small parties of men were out in every direction in search of water, but they met with no success. By this time the want of the reviving element

was plainly seen in our horses; their wild and glaring eyes, with their broken, nervous, and unsteady action, showing the intensity of their suffering. The mules, too, suffered much from the want of water, but nothing in comparison with the horses and oxen. The endurance of the mule is never so well tested as on a journey where both water and grass are scarce.

I have said that we continued our journey until the middle of the afternoon. About that time, and without seeing any sign ahead that could lead us to expect there was so great a change in the face of the country, we suddenly reached the brow of a precipitous bluff, some two or three hundred feet in height, which overlooked a large valley of broken and rugged appearance. This valley was four or five miles in width, a ridge of rough hills bounding it on the northern side, and not only the descent to the valley from the bluff on which we stood, but the whole surface below, was covered by dry cedars, apparently killed the previous year by fire. The spot upon which we stood was a level plain, covered with rank and coarse grass several feet in height. This grass, no rain having fallen for weeks, had become as dry as tinder. While consulting as to what course we should pursue, some one of our party discovered water at a distance of three or four miles across the valley below, a turn in the river bringing it to view. We immediately determined, if possible, to effect the descent of the steep and ragged bluff before us, and at least give our suffering animals a chance to quench their thirst, even if the water should prove too brackish for our own use.

Some thirty-five or forty of the advance-guard, instantly determined upon undertaking the toilsome and dangerous descent, and, to give my horse the earliest

turn at the water, I accompanied this party. After winding and picking our way for a full hour, pitching down precipices that were nearly perpendicular, and narrowly escaping frightful chasms and fissures of the rocks, we were all enabled to reach the valley with whole bones; but to do this we were frequently obliged to dismount from our horses, and in some places fairly to push them over abrupt descents which they never would have attempted without force. I have said that this bluff was some two or three hundred feet in height—we travelled at least a mile to gain this short distance, so devious and difficult was our path. The side of the bluff was formed of rough, sharp-pointed rocks, many of them of large size, and every little spot of earth had, in former years, given nourishment and support to some scraggy cedar, now left leafless and desolate by fire. Shoots of young cedars, however, were springing up wherever they could find root-hold; but they were not destined to attain the rank and standing of their sires.

After reaching the valley, we soon found the sandy bed of what had been a running stream in the rainy season. Immediately on striking it, our tired nags raised their heads, pricked up their ears, and set off at a brisk trot, instinctively knowing that water was in the vicinity. The horse scents water at an incredible distance, and frequently travellers upon the prairies are enabled to find it by simply turning their horses or mules loose.

A tiresome ride of three or four miles now brought us to the river. On reaching its banks, nothing could restrain our nags from dashing headlong down. Equally thirsty ourselves, we had fondly hoped that the waters might prove fresh and sweet; but they were even more brackish than any we had yet tasted. Repulsive

as it was, however, we swallowed enough to moisten our parched lips and throats, and ten minutes after were even more thirsty than before. Our horses, more fond of this water than any other, drank until apparently they could swallow no more.

While some of our party were digging into the sand at the edge of the stream, with the hope of finding water more fresh, and others were enjoying the cooling luxury of a bath, a loud report, as of a cannon, was heard in the direction of the camp, and a dark smoke was seen suddenly to arise.

“An Indian attack!” was the startling cry on all sides, and instantly we commenced huddling on our clothes and bridling our horses. One by one, as fast as we could get ready, we set off for what we supposed to be a scene of conflict. As we neared the camping-ground it became plainly evident that the prairie was on fire in all directions. When within a mile of the steep bluff, which cut off the prairie above from the valley, the bright flames were seen flashing among the dry cedars, and a dense volume of black smoke, rising above all, gave a painful sublimity to the scene.

On approaching nearer we were met by some of our companions, who were hurriedly seeking a passage up the steep. They had heard, from those on the prairie above, that the high grass had caught fire by accident, and that with such velocity had it spread that several of the wagons, and among them that of the commissioners, had been consumed. This wagon contained, in addition to a large number of cartridges, all the trunks and valuables of the mess to which I was attached, making me doubly anxious to gain the scene of destruction and learn the worst. It afterward proved that the explosion of the cartridges in the wagon

was what we had mistaken for the report of our six-pounder.

With redoubled exertions we now pushed forward towards the camp, but before we could reach the base of the high and rugged bluff the flames were dashing down its sides with frightful rapidity, leaping and flashing across the gullies and around the hideous cliffs, and roaring in the deep, yawning chasms with the wild and appalling noise of a tornado. As the flames would strike the dry tops of the cedars, reports, resembling those of the musket, would be heard; and in such quick succession did these reports follow each other, that I can compare them to nothing save the irregular discharge of infantry—a strange accompaniment to the wild roar of the devouring element.

The wind was blowing fresh from the west when the prairie was first ignited, carrying the flames, with a speed absolutely astounding, over the very ground on which we had travelled during the day. The wind lulled as the sun went down behind the mountains in the west, and now the fire began to spread slowly in that direction. The difficult passage by which we had descended was cut off by the fire, and night found our party still in the valley, unable to discover any other road to the table-land above. Our situation was a dangerous one, too; for had the wind sprung up and veered into the east, we should have found much difficulty in escaping, with such velocity did the flames extend.

If the scene had been grand previous to the going down of the sun, its magnificence was increased tenfold as night in vain attempted to throw its dark mantle over the earth. The light from acres and acres, I might say miles and miles, of inflammable and blazing

cedars, illuminated earth and sky with a radiance even more lustrous and dazzling than that of the noonday sun. Ever and anon, as some one of our comrades would approach the brow of the high bluff above us, he appeared not like an inhabitant of this earth. A lurid and most unnatural glow, reflected upon his countenance from the valley of burning cedars, seemed to render still more haggard and toilsome his burned and blackened features.

I was fortunate enough, about nine o'clock, to meet one of our men, who directed me to a passage up the steep ascent. He had just left the bluff above, and gave me a piteous recital of our situation. He was endeavouring to find water, after several hours of unceasing toil, and I left him with slight hopes that his search would be rewarded. By this time I was alone, not one of the companions who had started with me from the river being in sight or hearing. One by one they had dropped off, each searching for some path by which he might climb to the table-land above.

The first person I met, after reaching the prairie, was Mr. Falconer, standing with the blackened remnant of a blanket in his hand, and watching lest the fire should break out on the western side of the camp; for in that direction the exertions of the men, aided by a strong westerly wind, had prevented the devouring element from spreading. Mr. F. directed me to the spot where our mess was quartered. I found them sitting upon such articles as had been saved from the wagon, their gloomy countenances rendered more desponding by the reflection from the now distant fire. I was too much worn down by fatigue and deep anxiety to make many inquiries as to the extent of our loss; but hungry, and almost choked with thirst, I threw myself upon the

blackened ground and sought forgetfulness in sleep. It was hours, however, before sleep visited my eyelids. From the spot on which I was lying, a broad sheet of flame could still be seen, miles and miles in width, the heavens in that direction so brilliantly lit up that they resembled a sea of molten gold. In the west, a wall of impenetrable blackness appeared to be thrown up as the spectator suddenly turned from viewing the conflagration in the opposite direction. The subdued yet deep roar of the element could still be plainly heard as it sped on as with the wings of lightning across the prairies, while in the valley far below, the flames were flashing and leaping among the dry cedars, and shooting and circling about in manner closely resembling a magnificent pyrotechnic display—the general combination forming a scene of grandeur and sublimity which the pen shrinks from describing, and to which the power of words is wholly unequal.

Daylight the next morning disclosed a melancholy scene of desolation and destruction. North, south, and east, as far as the eye could reach, the rough and broken country was blackened by the fire, and the removal of the earth's shaggy covering of cedars and tall grass but laid bare, in painful distinctness, the awful chasms and rents in the steep hillside before us, as well as the valley spreading far and wide below. Afar off, in the distance, a dense black smoke was seen rising, denoting that the course of the devastating element was still onward. Two of our wagons only had been entirely consumed, but nearly all had suffered. A part of the baggage in the commissioners' wagon had been saved by the extraordinary exertions of some of the men, and just as they had relinquished the work the explosion of cartridges, which had first alarmed the party in the valley,

scattered the burning fragments of the wagon in every direction. My friend Falconer was so disfigured that I hardly knew him. His hair and eyebrows were scorched completely off, his face was in a perfect blister, his clothes burned from his back, and, without a hat, he seemed as though some insurance office had met with a heavy loss. Object of pity, however, as he appeared to be, I still could not help smiling at the sad and wo-begone figure he presented. Among the few trunks saved I fortunately found mine, containing nearly all my money, clothing, watch, and other valuables. The loss of a carpet-bag, which contained my boots and the rough articles I wore upon the road, was all I had to regret in the way of private property. Not so with the mess to which I was attached. The remnant of coffee we still had left was *burned* entirely too much; our pots, pans and kettles, knives and forks, were converted into old iron—everything was gone. We had nothing to eat, however, except half rations of miserably poor beef, and the necessity of falling back upon first principles, or, in other words, eating with our fingers, annoyed us but little.

The wagon of the commissioners contained, besides our private baggage, a quantity of jewelry, blankets, cartridges, rifles, muskets, &c. These were all destroyed. The other wagon which was consumed was loaded with goods, and from this nothing was saved. At one time the ammunition wagon, containing a large quantity of powder, was on fire, and only saved by the daring exertions of some of our men. It may appear singular to some of my readers that so much damage could be caused by the burning of grass alone, for on the spot where the wagons were drawn up there was nothing else; but it should be remembered that this

grass was very high, had been killed by dry weather, and flashed up and spread almost with the rapidity of a train of powder on being ignited. It is very easy, when a fire upon the prairies is seen coming towards a party, to escape its dangers by kindling the grass immediately about and taking possession of the newly-burned ground before the distant flames come up; but in this instance the fire commenced on the windward side, and with a frightful rapidity flashed directly along our line of wagons. The only wonder at the time was, how anything had been saved from the furious element that roared and crackled around.

We packed up and arranged our baggage as well as we could, hunted up and drove in our cattle, and late in the forenoon made a start. Our course was nearly west, and along the level prairie that overlooked the large valley upon our right. The mountains that we had seen the day previous gradually opened to the view, and as they became more visible, did not so well answer the description Carlos had given of *The Crows*. But few, however, felt disposed to doubt the man's words. We are slow in giving credence to any story, however plausible, that runs counter to our desires and hopes.

Our road was a good one this day, and we journeyed on with unusual rapidity. The men suffered incredibly from thirst, and were constantly seen eating the pods from the mesquit-trees, drawing the little moisture they possessed to relieve their parched tongues and throats. A bullet has considerable virtue in relieving thirst, and a piece of raw hide imparts much moisture to the mouth, as I have proved by sad experience.

At night we encamped in a beautiful dell, covered with the larger mesquit-trees and excellent grass. This encampment appeared to be near the termination of

the valley of cedars, and the face of the country onward was now entirely changed, being broken and mountainous. The only water we could find in the vicinity of this camp, which would otherwise have been one of the finest on our route, was entirely too brackish for use. The cattle and horses were fond of it; the men, however, could not swallow it without great nausea, and it did not in the least quench their thirst. That evening Carlos left camp, in company with an Italian named Brignoli, as they said, in search of water and the best route for our wagons on the ensuing day. Late at night they returned, Brignoli showing some specimens of quicksilver he had found, which were said to be very rich by those who pretended to any knowledge on the subject. He had joined the expedition as a volunteer, but was known to be constantly in search of precious minerals.

In the mean time every one in camp who spoke Spanish was questioning Carlos as to our position and prospects. Those who doubted his knowledge or mistrusted his faith did not hesitate to declare their misgivings aloud. No threats were offered, but Carlos understood just enough of English to know that they were talking of him, and not saying anything complimentary either to his knowledge of the country or his honesty. The next morning early he was missing, and, on looking about the camp, Brignoli, too, was found absent. This circumstance created the greatest excitement among all; yet Carlos had many believers and friends—and they still insisted that he had only left the camp for a short time, to hunt. The oxen were yoked and hitched to the wagons, and every preparation made for resuming our journey, but Carlos was yet missing.

It is impossible, either to be placed or imagined, in a

worse and more pitiable situation than the one in which we now found ourselves. The hope that we were within some sixty miles of the frontier settlements vanished with Carlos, for we knew that he would not have left so long as there was a probability of his leading us safely through the difficulties in which we were involved. He had been offered inducements too strong for him thus to desert us, unless he himself was lost and feared the consequences of leading us farther astray. We were suffering, too, from the want of fresh water, and knew full well that there was none on the road we had come short of three days' march over a prairie rendered desolate by the great fire. Our only hope was in going ahead, and when nine o'clock came we pushed on without rudder or compass, the melancholy truth plainly visible in almost every face that we were lost among the wilderness prairies of the West.

As we pursued our melancholy journey, there were still a few among us who thought that Carlos would come up and honestly account for his absence. They even declared their belief that we had now arrived within sight of the Angosturas, or Narrows of Red River, and that if Carlos had really left us it was because he feared that some of the leading men in New Mexico, inimical to the Texans, might blame him for guiding us directly to their homesteads. About noon we were fortunate enough to find a cool and delicious spring of fresh water, and near it a pond large enough to water all our horses and cattle. After drinking deeply at the fountain-head, and fervently hoping for a continuance of such good fortune, we filled our gourds and canteens, and resumed our march. Whenever we looked back we could see an immense smoke in the east, plainly denoting that the prairie fire which had

broken out two days previous was still raging. Early in the afternoon a heavy, black cloud was noticed directly over the spot, from which rain was descending apparently in torrents; beyond, and in fact all around this cloud, the sky was clear and without a speck. Here was a shower got up on the Espy principle, although at a heavy cost to our party.

Our course was now nearly west. On our left, and running in nearly a northwest and southeast direction, a range of mountains was plainly visible—the chain which, it was now evident enough, Carlos had mistaken for *The Crows*. I say mistaken, for up to the morning of his departure I believe the fellow's intentions were honest, and that he really supposed the party to be on Red River. The water in the Wichita, for that the river we were on undoubtedly was, resembled in every way that of the former, while the country around bore the same appearance; and as Carlos had trapped on both streams, probably without noticing either carefully, and knew but little of them even as low down as Coffee's Station, and was unacquainted with the American name of the river, the mistake might easily occur.

I have mentioned the appearance of the country to the left; on our right it was much broken, and evidently impassable for wagons. A party of some thirty of us, all well mounted, left the command to explore thoroughly this latter section, and our leader, Captain Caldwell, declared that he would not return until he had satisfactorily ascertained whether we were in the neighbourhood of the Narrows or not. Captain C. was the first man to suggest that the stream up which we had been so long journeying was not the Red River, and also to express doubts whether Carlos really knew as much of the country as he pretended.

After working our way through a succession of rugged hills, cedar-brakes, and ravines, for a distance of some ten miles, we at length reached the stream upon our right. It had dwindled down to a small brook, and the head spring was evidently somewhere in the mountains in our vicinity.* The water was extremely salt, and unfit for use. Several trails were found leading along the banks, made by Indians and mustangs, and in one place mule and horse tracks were seen, together with the print of a white man's shoe in the sand, evidently made either by Carlos or his companion, or by one of Howland's men. Being satisfied that we were not in the neighbourhood of the Narrows, and that it was impossible to take the wagons by the road we had travelled, we started back for the spring we had found in the morning, and arrived there at sunset, ourselves and horses completely worn down with fatigue.

Captain Caldwell had shot a fat buck during the day, which had been dressed, and by the side of the cool spring we made a delicious meal. At dark, we re-saddled our horses, and after finding the trail of the wagons with some difficulty, pushed on and reached the command about ten o'clock, encamped without water, and extremely solicitous for our return.

Early the next morning spies were sent forward to seek water and a passage through the mountains, myself, with three or four companions, going back to the spring, a distance of some ten miles, for a draught of water! It may seem a long distance, ten miles, to go for a draught of fresh water, but at that time I would have gone fifty. After allowing our horses a rest of two or

* I have little doubt that we were now among the Wichita Mountains. They have never, I believe, been laid down upon any map, but old trappers and campaigners often speak of them.

three hours, and *doing* our washing—for at this time every man was his own washer-woman—we set off to rejoin the command. It may not be amiss to say that our washing was very light, consisting only of a checked shirt and a pair of coarse stockings or socks.

Late in the afternoon we reached the camping-place of the previous night, and found that the command had moved forward. A brisk trot brought us up with our companions at dark, encamped by a small spring and creek of bitter water, strongly impregnated, to judge from the taste, with copperas and magnesia. Whatever the substances held in solution by this water may have been, it operated as a powerful cathartic; but the men, unable to find any other, partook of it in large quantities.

On the following morning a council of officers was held, at which it was determined to send a party of fifty of our best-mounted men in a northerly direction, with orders not to return until they had found Red River. Orders were also given to the commander of the party, Captain Caldwell, to send guides back from day to day, as a good wagon road could be found, in order that the expedition might get on as fast as possible.

The party left on the 17th of August, and on the same day Doctor Brashear, our assistant surgeon, died of a liver complaint, and was buried with military honours. He was a native, if I recollect right, of Kentucky, much respected by all who knew him.

Another council was held after the spies had left, and at this meeting it was resolved to reduce our rations of beef. Where we were was problematical; our distance from the settlements no one could even calculate, and as we might still be months in reaching them, it was evident enough that our beef would not hold out. The regular ration of three pounds a day to each man was